

Southeast Asia Program

at Cornell University

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Statue of Monk Sariputta, chief disciple of the Buddha. Sariputta leans forward as if listening intently to the Buddha. This statue is owned by the SEAP Program and lives in the Kahin Center.

Photo credit: Yajie Zheng

SEAP DIRECTORY [seap.einaudi.cornell.edu]

SEAP ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

180 Uris Hall, Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14853
607.255.2378 | fax 607.254.5000
SEAP@cornell.edu
listserv: SEAP-L@cornell.edu

Kaja M. McGowan, Director
seap_director@einaudi.cornell.edu

Thamora Fishel, Associate Director
tfishel@cornell.edu

Betty Nguyen, Administrative Assistant
cmn82@cornell.edu

Jessica Snyder, New Initiatives Coordinator
jrs599@cornell.edu

KAHIN CENTER FOR ADVANCED RESEARCH ON SOUTHEAST ASIA

640 Stewart Avenue
Ithaca, New York 14850

Ryan Buyco, Building Coordinator
kahinbuildingmgr@einaudi.cornell.edu
Kahin Center, Room 104
607.255.3619

SEAP OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS

Brenna Fitzgerald, Communications and Outreach Coordinator
bef7@cornell.edu
Kahin Center, Room 117
607.255.6688
seap.einaudi.cornell.edu/outreach

SEAP PUBLICATIONS

seap.einaudi.cornell.edu/publications
Editorial Office
Kahin Center, Room 215
607.255.4359

Sarah E.M. Grossman, Managing Editor
sg265@cornell.edu

Fred Conner, Assistant Editor
flc2@cornell.edu

BUSINESS OFFICE

SEAP-pubs@cornell.edu
95 Brown Road, Box 1004
241 Langmuir Lab
Ithaca, New York 14850
607.255.8038 | fax 607.255.7534

Cynthia Dickinson, Business Manager
cld227@cornell.edu

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

On a blustery December evening last semester, I attended the Cornell Gamelan Ensemble fall concert directed by SEAP faculty member and senior lecturer in the Department of Music Christopher J. Miller (see Professor Miller's feature, "New Directions in New Music among the Islands," and note the date for the spring gamelan concert, April 24 at 1 p.m. in Barnes Hall). As I settled in to experience the night's performance, I was particularly struck by the variety of instruments—beautifully carved and impeccably arranged—which, the concert program informed me, were brought to the United States for the New York World's Fair in 1964 and are currently on long-term loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This elegant visual display was enough to keep me gazing for hours, noticing exquisite details on the individual instruments. Then the sounds bloomed, a few notes at a time, and escalated into a layered harmony of tones and rhythms in a whole new scale. As I sat in awe amidst the musicians, Cornell faculty, students, and community members, I thought how the Southeast Asia Program operates no differently than a melodious gamelan ensemble.

In the short five months I have been communications and outreach coordinator (and also Bulletin editor), I have witnessed so many pieces of SEAP—the multifaceted and extensive efforts of our director, Kaja McGowan (see her photo essay, "From Sandstone to Selfie Sticks at Shwe Sandaw: Experiencing Pagan in Seven Steps"), and our associate director, Thamora Fishel, as well as the talent of our Cornell and visiting graduate students, many of whom contributed content to this issue. For example, in her feature "The Structure of Silk: The Institutionalization of Silk and the Role of the Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture of Surin, Thailand," Alexandra Dalferro critically examines the Royal Peacock ranking system of silks produced in Thailand, while Allegra Giovine's feature,

"From Chance Encounters to Collaborative Exchange: Forming Community at the 2015 Burma/Myanmar Research Forum," emphasizes the importance of academic community. The expertise and eloquence of our faculty continues to impress me (see Professor Chiara Formichi's course feature, "Perform-



ing Islam in Southeast Asia") as do the tireless efforts of our staff (see Aye Min Thant's Outreach Column, "Burmese Beyond Cornell: SEAP Brings Burmese Language Instruction to Utica," about expanding access to Burmese language courses, and Ryan Buyco's amusing Kahin Center update, "Productive Ghosts at Kahin"). These are just a few of this issue's offerings.

While the Southeast Asia Program consists of individuals from many different backgrounds and disciplines, it operates smoothly as one, and a distinguished one at that. This community radiates harmony in the success of its events (always widely attended!) and the scope of its impact—this National Resource Center grant cycle focuses on outreach in the form of resource sharing through a digitized lending library as well as professional development opportunities for community college and education faculty.

This winter, I witnessed an even tighter coming together of this community in its warm remembrance of a

highly esteemed member of the SEAP faculty, Benedict Anderson, whose December passing inspired myriad posts on the SEAP Facebook page, a soon-to-be web page, dozens of articles from former students about his influence on their scholarship, and a widely attended memorial service held at Sage

Chapel at the end of January. Indeed, Professor Anderson will be greatly missed, but his presence is felt in every corner of this program. His memory flourishes in the hearts and minds of the people all over the world whom he inspired.

Many of the articles in this issue touch on what it means to be a part of an academic community such as SEAP and how the program has in some way widened perspectives and transformed lives; in particular, see the feature by undergraduate SEAP student Ethel Roxas titled "A Layered Perspective: Exploring My Identity through Filipino History and Literature."

I have much to look forward to and be grateful for in my new position. I am honored to be one of the pieces of SEAP and await your inquiries, article ideas, and suggestions for improvement.

Warmly,
Brenna Fitzgerald
bef7@cornell.edu

Benedict Anderson

1936-2015

The Southeast Asia Program has been mourning the loss of Professor Emeritus Benedict Anderson since December 13, 2015 when word of his death in East Java reached Ithaca and, nearly simultaneously, spread through the news, social media, and the global networks of his former students, friends, and colleagues. At SEAP we have been touched by the flood of tributes and remembrances of Om Ben that have been circulating and that continue to be written as many of us come to terms with his passing. Each funny story, each moving rendition of the qualities that made him an amazing teacher and scholar, all contain a kernel of insight into the SEAP community that Ben helped create. These narratives connect us to each other through the shared experience of having been shaped by Ben—by his ideas, by his way of thinking, by his way of being in the world.

On January 31, 2016, SEAP gathered on the Cornell campus to honor Ben and to celebrate his completed life. This memorial will be covered in the Fall 2016 SEAP Bulletin, along with a longer tribute. A compilation of the many eloquent pieces that have been written in Ben's honor have been gathered and can be found on the SEAP website: <https://seap.einaudi.cornell.edu/benedict-anderson-memorials>.

Although Jim Siegel's insights (from "Necrology" Jakarta Post, December 19, 2015) apply beyond SEAP, they seem especially fitting: "An obituary conventionally names the deceased's 'contributions' as if they have been laid to rest, to be revived when necessary. Careful readers of Anderson's works will find themselves revived, living members of an organization without a form, joined in unimagined solidarity with others unknown to themselves."





NEW Directions in NEW Music among the Islands



Christopher J. Miller
senior lecturer of music

This past July and August, I traveled to Indonesia to visit the research sites for my recently completed dissertation on *musik kontemporer*.¹ The range of Indonesian music referred to by this term is impossibly broad, but the most exemplary instances may be glossed as avant-garde or experimental. Composers inspired by Western models have written works for piano and other Western instruments in the austere and atonal style of high modernism as well as more experimental pieces for bowed glasses and cardboard, or for amplified water sounds. Other composers with foundations in Indonesian traditions have explored the sonic potential of gamelan instruments by using them in entirely unconventional ways, including such iconoclastic gestures as dragging gongs on the floor.

GLOSSARY OF INSTRUMENTS:

angklung: rattle with two to four resonant bamboo tubes, usually played like a bell choir, with melodies split up between the musicians, who play one or two pitches

djembe (or jembe): large goblet drum of the Mandé of West Africa

hasapi: plucked two-string lute of the Toba Batak, played in small ensembles with flutes, reeds, and percussion

kacapi: plucked zither of the Sundanese of West Java with metal strings over a boat- or box-shaped wooden body, used to accompany sung poetry

kendhang: generic term for doubled-headed hand drums of various sizes played in Javanese gamelan

ney: rim-blown reed flute common to Arab, Persian, and Central Asian musics

rebab: two-string bowed lute, related to similar instruments in the Middle East, played in Javanese gamelan

sape': boat-shaped lute of the Kayan and Kenyah of Kalimantan, carved from a single tree trunk, played solo or in duos for entertainment or as an accompaniment for dance

shakuhachi: end-blown bamboo flute of Japan, historically played by wandering Buddhist priests

tabla: pair of hand drums used in Hindustani classical music

'ud (or oud): pear-shaped string instrument found throughout the Middle East, related to the European lute



Stage for the Festival Telaga Madirda.

Like the European-language terms from which it derives, *musik kontemporer* refers not to contemporary music in general, but more specifically to certain notions of musical modernity. It hinges on the conceit that certain kinds of contemporary or new music are more contemporary and new than others. Proponents tout the new directions and approaches taken. My title plays on this tendency in the current discourse surrounding *musik kontemporer*—which was just as much the focus of my research as the music itself. The most striking of the new directions I allude to, however, lead away from such preoccupations. Instead, their focus shifts from a prioritizing of the “new” to a prioritizing of the “here”—or more precisely, to two overlapping but not entirely congruent senses of the here. The newly prominent term *musik nusantara* makes explicit one of these: *nusantara* (archipelago), from an Old Javanese amalgam of the indigenous *nusa* (island) and the Sanskrit *antara* (inside, between, among), is a poetic synonym for Indonesia. The other sense is implicit in the actual practices connected to, but not fully contained by, this term: a redoubled interest in traditional musics, musics that originally sprang from, and continue to represent,

more particular “heres.” These musics come from different islands, both literally and figuratively, most of which are part of *nusantara*, but not all.

In the early stages of planning my trip, I had some intention of dividing my time equally among the three cities where I did my dissertation research, and the Western-oriented and traditionally-based scenes I had written about. But it didn’t work out that way. I did manage to connect with a few key contacts on the Western-oriented side in the few days I spent in Jogja (or Yogyakarta) near the beginning of my trip, and in the evening and a day I spent in Jakarta before flying home. I also made a new connection with a younger composer and writer, Erie Setiawan, who’s the driving force behind *Art Music Today*—a “music information center” dedicated as much to documentation and publishing as to producing concerts. Its name proposes a different kind of reframing than *musik nusantara*, one that better accommodates musical styles not specific to the Indonesian islands.

In June 2014 *Art Music Today* published a compilation of writings by Slamet Abdul Sjukur,² the renowned composer responsible for introducing the term *musik kontemporer* in 1976,

when he returned to Indonesia after fourteen years of studying and working in Paris. Along with the term itself, Sjukur introduced some of its most potent models, including the use of prepared piano (a piano transformed into a percussion orchestra by sticking objects of all sorts between its strings) and intermedia. His *Parentheses IV* from 1978 featured three dancers and a thirteen-year-old girl painting on a plexiglass panel. He peppered a lecture on “The Anatomy of Musik Kontemporer,” which proclaimed that music could be “anything at all,” with recordings of “a motor running, a car crash, a bird chirping, a woman speaking French.”

Sjukur also composed for traditional Indonesian instruments, setting a precedent followed by nearly all Western-oriented composers of musik kontemporer. He first set out in this direction a year before leaving France, with a commission for a folklore festival for which the Indonesian Embassy asked him to make do with readily available resources. He decided to have a random mix of Indonesians connected to the embassy, none of whom were musicians, vocalize and play *angklung*, a bamboo rattle found throughout Southeast Asia that is especially popular among the Sundanese of West Java—and, in the diatonic version suitable for playing Western-style patriotic songs from the Revolutionary era, among mass groupings of schoolchildren and consular officials. Sjukur’s set of pieces included quirky arrangements of a few of those songs, as well as a striking depiction of a train leaving a station, a realization using the acoustic means of *musique concrète*, a genre of new music created with recorded sounds pioneered by Pierre Schaeffer, with whom Sjukur had worked.

Art Music Today’s 2014 compilation was published in conjunction with a retrospective concert of Sjukur’s music on the occasion of his seventy-ninth birthday, which included “GAME-Land,” his first piece for full gamelan, from 2003. The timing of the publication and concert turned out to be prescient, as Sjukur died in March 2015.

The time I thought I would spend in Jogja and Jakarta got squeezed out by

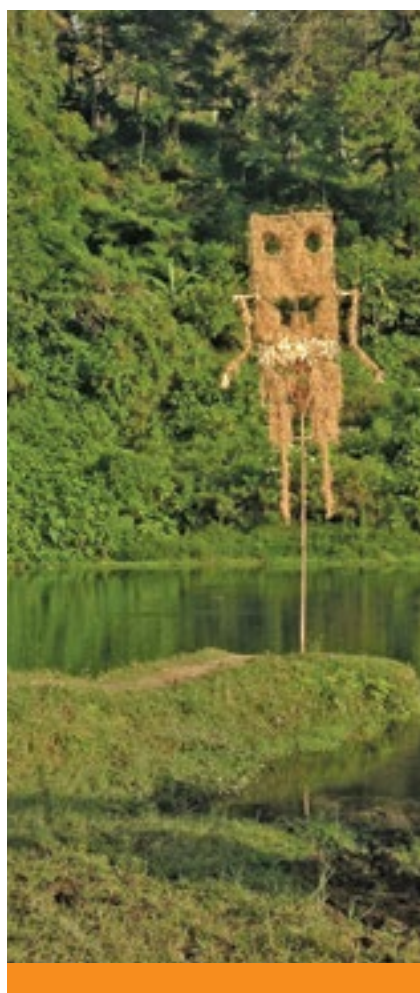
a combination of prior commitments, new invitations, and a general gravitational pull that kept me in and around Solo (or Surakarta), where I had studied gamelan in the mid-1990s. I gave two academic presentations, including one at the Indonesian Institute for the Arts (ISI, formerly STSI, and before that ASKI), that allowed me to give something back to the group of composers who had inspired my interest in musik kontemporer in the first place, when I first heard a program of their innovative works in Vancouver in 1991.

The other opportunities sprang from my involvement in a network of creative musicians in which ISI is a central node. It was in and around these artists that I found the most abundant evidence of the growing importance of a broader swath of traditional music, Indonesian and otherwise, to a variety of creative endeavors, and a sense that musik nusantara was displacing musik

kontemporer as their preferred frame of reference.

A month before leaving for Indonesia, I received a message from Peni Candra Rini, an increasingly prominent singer and composer on the ISI faculty, with whom I’d collaborated on a number of occasions; I’ve brought her to Cornell twice, in 2012 and 2014, and she’ll be coming with another project this spring. She invited me to join her and several musicians in her home studio to workshop music she was creating for an evening-length program in Jakarta. That studio, which houses a small gamelan, doubles as the showroom for her husband, Dwi “Idud” Nugroho, a gifted and innovative instrument builder. Mostly he makes Western instruments—violins, guitars, some percussion—but he’s also made Middle Eastern *‘ud*, and several Javanese *rebab*. Bobby Budi Santoso, an old friend and longtime collaborator with Peni who was there to record the session, gave an impromptu performance afterward on another of Idud’s creations, which looked like a cross between a guitar and a *sape’*, the iconic “boat lute” of the Kayan and Kenyah of Kalimantan. In opening his improvisation he alluded to the sape’s idiom, juxtaposing melody with a rhythmic drone produced by periodically strumming on open strings. He soon transitioned to an avant-gardist exploration of the sympathetic strings along the instrument’s back, a feature found neither in sape’ nor in standard guitars. Bobby’s demonstration followed those of Antok Laf, a young musician from Mojokerto, East Java, on several Minang wind instruments from West Sumatra, and of Iswanto Martono, a distinguished young gamelan musician who’s played extensively with Peni, on a Middle Eastern *ney*-type flute he built out of blue metal.

Two days after landing in Indonesia I received a message from my friend Jessica Kenney, another singer/composer based in Seattle whom I’ve known since the mid-1990s. She invited me to join her and Darsono Hadiraharjo, one of the finest players of “classical” Javanese gamelan of his generation (he was born in 1979) for a concert in the Bukan



A decoration in front of Telaga Madirda.

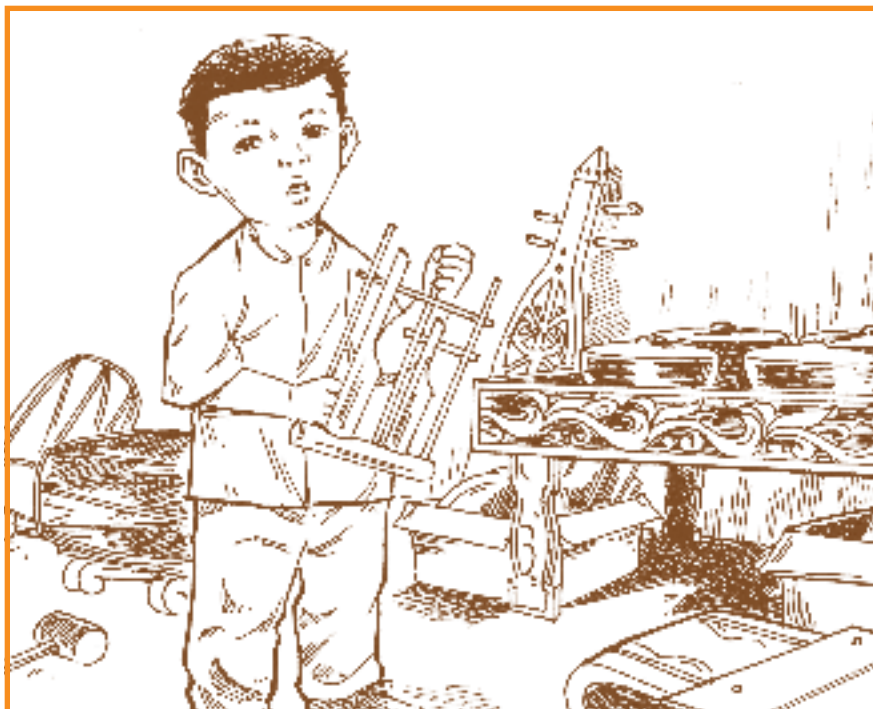


Illustration from the children's book *Alat Musik Paling Hebat (The Greatest Instruments)*, from the series "*Bianglala Anak Nusantara*" (*Nusantara Children's Rainbow*) published by Litara Foundation (Ngamprah, Indonesia, 2015). The boy is holding an *angklung*; to his right, leaning against the wall, is a *sape*'.

Musik Biasa series at the arts center in Solo. This series was started by one of Peni's mentors at ISI, the maverick Balinese composer I Wayan Sadra, and carried on after his passing by some of his other protégés. It proposes another open-ended alternative to the formulation *musik kontemporer*—*bukan musik biasa* translates as "not your ordinary music."

Our set was something of a reunion—a revisiting of Jessica's fusions of Javanese, Persian, and Arabic music, a decade after first trying out this material at a gig at The Stone, a small experimental music performance space in New York. We were followed by a band from Jogja called NOS.³ Looking over their Facebook page, I wondered what made them "world music" rather than "etnik rock." Perhaps it was because they were strictly instrumental, the role of the lead vocalist filled by a violinist, Ukok Hutabarat, who sported dreadlocks. Beside him, backed by a rhythm section of electric guitar, keyboard, bass, and drums, was a second lead, who instead of guitar mostly played *sape*'. For one out of their four numbers, he switched to *hasapi*,

a smaller lute from the Toba Batak of North Sumatra. The members of the band, as Ukok pointed out in introducing them, were themselves Batak.

A few days before this concert, I learned about an event taking place the following day that I became determined to check out: Festival Telaga Madirda, which was to be held beside the small spring-fed lake high up on the slopes of Gunung Lawu, the imposing volcano to the east of Solo, from which it took its name. It appeared to be an outgrowth of Lima Gunung, a festival held in various locations around the five peaks surrounding the city of Magelang that I had long heard about but not yet managed to attend. There was in fact a group of young comic dancers from Gejayan, a small village I had visited in 2004 with Sutanto, the driving force behind Festival Lima Gunung, who many years before devoting himself to working with mountain-village communities was a leading figure in the Western-oriented *musik kontemporer* scene in Jogja.

Most of the musicians were from the area: kids' and women's gamelan groups, as well as a multigenerational

collection of performers, including a seven-year-old, playing *djembe*, a drum from West Africa that has become the focus of a thriving cottage industry in Bali. It thus shared with Festival Lima Gunung an emphasis on the local, but in contrast to that festival's independence from the urban arts establishment, Festival Telaga Madirda was organized by individuals from ISI, with support from the Tourism Department of the Karanganyar Regency. There was one small group with members who had studied at ISI: Gondrong Gunarto, the primary organizer of *Bukan Musik Biasa*, played *kacapi*, a Sundanese zither, but as he pointed out, in his own idiosyncratic style; and Misbach Bilok, a younger musician from Makassar, South Sulawesi, who played *shakuhachi*, the iconic Japanese bamboo flute. Jessica Kenney had agreed to join them the day before.

The impulse to fashion new music out of elements from Indonesia's various traditional musics—or, in the oft-cited formulation of nationalist and educator Ki Hadjar Dewantara, of the "peaks" of culture from throughout the archipelago—shows up as far back as the early years of post-independence state building. The founders of the first gamelan conservatory in Solo spoke of artists there undertaking "a thousand and one varieties, experiments" to synthesize Indonesian musical arts.⁴ Such efforts would not begin in earnest until the 1970s and '80s, with isolated instances such as Sjukur's work for *angklung*, and in a more sustained way at institutions like ISI, after it diversified from a core focus on the court-style gamelan of Surakarta by drawing in students and faculty from other regions—first Balinese, then Sundanese from West Java, and later Minangkabau from West Sumatra.

In contrast to the kind of folkloric reworkings of the traditional in other multicultural post-colonies, the focus at ISI was on the creation of autonomous works of art, with considerable emphasis on conspicuous innovation. Musicians during this period explored the sonic potential of instruments—a stylistic approach that led eventually to Sadra dragging gongs on the floor.

They would also weave in idiomatic elements from their respective regional traditions, but within the frame of “Art,” capitalized by an avant-garde sensibility that confined them to specialized concert venues. In some cases the fact of fusion was brought to the fore, as with Sadra’s piece “MIBA,” titled after its combination of “Minang” and “Balinese” instruments and vocal styles. Such fusion became increasingly central to the Sono Seni Ensemble—in which both Peni and Gondrong Gunarto played—that Sadra led in the last decade of his life. Yet Sadra disparaged theme park-type representations of Indonesia’s cultural diversity, à la Taman Mini.⁵ He dismissed his commission, for an Independence Day celebration, to create a medley of music representing different provinces as “not very serious work.”

The embrace of the term musik nusantara signals a reframing of creative musical activity on the part of those who previously identified what they did as musik kontemporer. Many continue to value the experimental and the avant-garde. In the post-concert discussion at Bukan Musik Biasa the question was raised whether NOS was too mainstream (too *biasa*) in their aesthetic, a critique that Jessika’s set was spared. Nevertheless, the frame encompasses that which has rock or other popular idioms as its point of departure, as suggested by the image on the banner for the concert of the *wayang* character Tagog, wearing sunglasses and holding an electric guitar.

In the workshop session I attended, Peni encouraged her attendees not to think in terms of playing *gendhing* (traditional gamelan pieces), but to “experiment.” Yet her work on the whole reflects in equal measure her background in traditional gamelan music,

her time working with maverick composers like Sadra, and her experience in the Jakarta-centered pop world—which she was on the verge of immersing herself in fully before returning to study at ISI. It was in Jakarta that she met Bobby Budi Santoso, who before similarly turning to focus on his own musical ideas was an in-demand session musician.

Whether stemming from pop or art, the term musik nusantara highlights an engagement with the multiplicity of traditional Indonesian musics. What’s remarkable about the strengthening of the direction accompanied by this terminological turn is the current dimensions of its breadth and depth. I observed, when I conducted my dissertation research in 2004 and 2005, a growing interest in what then was most often called *musik etnik*. The trend was evident not only among musicians affiliated with academic institutions such as ISI, but also among a few more adventurous Indonesian jazz musicians. But insofar as it incorporated traditional Indonesian musics beyond its three loftiest “peaks”—Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese gamelan—it did so through collaboration with culture-bearers of other regional traditions. Just as often, especially in more pop-oriented instances, it incorporated elements from non-Indonesian traditional musics, such as Indian *tabla*, or West African djembe, put into circulation by the global phenomenon of “world music.”

What struck me most during my most recent trip was how Indonesian musicians with various backgrounds were engaging with a number of less prominent traditional Indonesian musics, from regions other than their own. Antok Laf introduced himself as an autodidact, who started out playing

in percussion groups—which included both Javanese *kendhang* and djembe—and got interested in Minang winds after meeting a musician from West Sumatra who had moved to his hometown in East Java. The members of NOS proudly introduced themselves as Batak, but featured the sape’ from distant Kalimantan.

That these kinds of cross-regional explorations are occurring suggests that efforts like the monumental research and recording project that resulted in the twenty-volume audio CD series *Music of Indonesia*,⁶ or the pedagogical materials and approaches developed by the Lembaga Pendidikan Seni Nusantara (translated by its director, Endo Suanda, as Indonesian Institute for Art Education), have had some impact. But they are also related to an impulse that exceeds the frame implied by musik nusantara, an impulse that led Peni’s husband, Idud, to make an ‘ud, Iswanto Martono to build and learn to play ney, and Misbach Bilok to play shakuhachi.

In his biography of Gendhon Humardani, who as head of ISI played a central role in the directions taken there in the 1970s and ‘80s, Rustopo proposes the concept of “Indonesiacentrism” to describe a persistent attitude that links Humardani to his intellectual forbears, such as Dewantara. This outlook is not bound by the “walls” of Indonesia, but rather keeps Indonesia at the center of a global perspective.⁷ Musik nusantara similarly seems less about an exclusive sort of nationalist sentiment and more about an expression of pride in the richness of Indonesia’s contributions to a world of musical traditions, any of which may be taken as raw ingredients for a new Indonesian music. 🍷

NOTES

- 1 Christopher J. Miller, “Cosmopolitan, Nativist, Eclectic: Cultural Dynamics in Indonesian Musik Kontemporer” (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 2014).
- 2 Slamet Abdul Sjukur, *Sluman Slumun Slamet: Esai-esai Slamet Abdul Sjukur, 1976–2013* (Yogyakarta: Art Music Today, 2014).
- 3 “NOS at the Bukan Musik Biasa,” [Date?], YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7u1BncfDMbQ>. The date of the performance: 31 July 2015. The date the video was first accessed: 23 December 2015.
- 4 Soekanto, quoted by Judith Becker, *Traditional Music in Modern Java: Gamelan in a Changing Society* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980), 34.
- 5 “Indonesia Indah” (“Beautiful Indonesia”-in-Miniature theme park), a pet project of Taman Mini, wife of former president Soeharto, is located on the southern outskirts of Jakarta.
- 6 *Music of Indonesia*. Compiled by Philip Yampolsky. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1991–1999). Sponsored jointly by the Smithsonian Institution and the Society for Indonesian Performing Arts, the twenty-volume series was released both in the United States and Indonesia.
- 7 Rustopo, *Gendhon Humardani ‘Sang Gladiator’: Arsitek Kehidupan Seni Tradisi Modern* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Mahavhira, 2001), 304.

The Structure of *Silk*

The Institutionalization of Silk and the Role of the Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture of Surin, Thailand




Alexandra Dalferro
PhD candidate in anthropology

The Queen Sirikit Sericulture Center of Surin is a 15-minute drive from downtown Surin, Thailand. The town shifts quickly to farmland once you drive beyond the railroad tracks. Off the highway and across from a small elementary school, a massive white silkworm statue looms, signaling the entrance to the Sericulture Center. The worm's 15-foot-long body does not rest on the ground but reaches up into the sky, rearing its head like a roaring lion. Only its back legs keep it anchored to the earth, and its three pairs of thoracic legs jut out like sharp teeth. The monument is disarming, the worm's posture aggressive: what is this worm trying to tell us in its attack-like stance? What does the worm defend, and who or what does it confront?

While this anatomically accurate silkworm monument can be apprehended in various ways, its location and context situate the worm as the embodiment of the center's rational scientific approach to sericulture, or the processes of silk

making and weaving. In striving to achieve their institution's mission to enhance the quality of silk produced in the area, center employees and affiliates both elevate and elide particular histories and attributes of Surin silks. Through tracing the history of the attempted institutionalization of silk, many questions arise. Does a silk-ranking system created by a queen have any place in the life of an older silk weaver and rice farmer in Surin? What happens when a type of cloth produced worldwide becomes a marker of national identity, which in the case of Thailand is also always linked to ethnic identification?

Silk has been woven in the area today known as Thailand for at least 1,000 years. These textiles were a key component of tributary gifts exchanged among neighboring kingdoms, as the choice of cloth bestowed rank upon the recipient in accord with political and social hierarchies. In 1903, with the help of Japanese sericulture experts, King Chulalongkorn created a Sericulture Department within the Ministry of Agricul-



ture to encourage interest in weaving by providing instruction and supplies.¹ The department's founding coincided with the start of territorialization, when the king sought to replace the tributary system of statecraft with a centralized bureaucracy. This process aimed to situate Siam's ethnic "others" as "Thai" living within the borders of a naturalized nation-state.²

Efforts with regard to the Sericulture Department suggest that silk was likely identified as an important component of national incorporation and a potent symbol of burgeoning "Thai-ness." Silk seems to have embodied entrenched "Thai" values and imagery, such as the self-sufficient agrarian family, the industrious female who clothes her kin, or the grandmother who passes down her weaving skills and knowledge to the younger generation.

The Sericulture Department ceased its activities during World War II. In the 1970s, silk experienced a revival and Sirikit, the current Thai queen, sought to increase its momentum with her own project based in northeast Thailand. Why did the queen select silk production as her new cause over other issues and forms of expression? Perhaps she wanted to gain favor in northeastern villages where Communist insurgents were being targeted, and she saw her silk program as a way to reassert royal hierarchy in areas vulnerable to Communist rhetoric. Or, perhaps the revival served to remind citizens of certain qualities of "Thainess," such as self-sufficiency, refined and beautiful cultural expressions, and peaceful agrarian ways—qualities that she feared were being effaced in an era of civil unrest.

The queen's official objectives were to safeguard threatened heritage and to raise the standard of living in rural areas. To facilitate this process, in 1976 Sirikit founded the SUPPORT Foundation, which still exists today. In a modern reconfiguration of the ancient offering of tributary gifts to display obeisance to more powerful rulers, weaving groups across Thailand sell silk directly to the SUPPORT Foundation in Bangkok, where the cloths are turned into a range of products.

Beyond the silkworm statue, the Sericulture Center of Surin compound sits surrounded by mulberry fields. Open-air pavilions surround a central office building. Exhibits about the Royal Peacock ranking system, natural dyes, local patterns, and the silk making and weaving process fill the outdoor spaces.

The center's vision, history, and organizational structure are displayed in a glass-protected bulletin board in the office building entryway. The board presents the provincial motto of Surin: "The land of large elephants, splendid silk, and lovely silver beads, with a wealth of *prasats*, sweet cabbage, and aromatic rice; beauty along with culture." These easily digestible and commodified markers of difference distinguish Surin from Thailand's 76 other provinces while anchoring it within a national system of acceptable symbols of identification.

Surin is one of nine provinces in Thailand to mention silk in its motto. Although the motto does not describe Surin silks beyond the adjective "splendid," silk that is woven in Surin is primarily produced within ethnic Khmer communities. The Thai, or ethnic Tai/Dai, and Thai-Chinese make up approximately 95 percent of Thailand's 67.7 million inhabitants. Approximately 1.4 million ethnic Khmer, or 2 percent of the nation's population, are concentrated in the three northeastern provinces of Surin, Srisaket, and Buriram.³ These communities can claim descent from the ancient Khmer Empire, which spread across much of present-day Thailand from the ninth to the fifteenth century CE. Many Khmer today, however, declare a hyphenated identity, Khmer-Thai, renouncing ethnic kinship with the Khmer of modern Cambodia. Nevertheless, Khmer weavers are quick to point out that the patterns and techniques they employ in weaving are Khmer and not Thai. Khmerness—but not necessarily Cambodian Khmerness—remains a meaningful category of self-identification.

As a branch of the national Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture, the Sericulture Center of Surin works to assure that locally produced silks meet national standards. This ensures their market competitiveness and promotes the reputation of Thai silk. Both institutions draw attention to their commitments to "local knowledge," or *phum bpan yaa thaawng thin*. "Local knowledge" is invoked frequently by weavers and institutions alike to describe the intergenerational transmission of weaving skills and particular practices, such as pattern-making and dyeing.

The Sericulture Center of Surin upholds universalizing scientific knowledge practices and claims by, for example, conducting genetic experiments on silkworms and studying worms at a microscopic, cellular level. These ways of know-

ing are achieved through specialist training that emphasizes skills in empirical observation and certain kinds of disciplined, standardized record keeping. At the Silk Center, with its life cycle flowcharts of silkworms and morphological diagrams displayed for visitors, such approaches to knowledge are unmarked—not qualified with the distinction of “local”—and therefore naturalized.

In contrast, Thai and Khmer “local knowledge,” such as stories of local patterns and beliefs about silkworm behaviors, is usually prefaced as such. Nevertheless, the two discourses are not always cleanly separable, especially in regulatory and market contexts when both are used to create silk’s value and meaning. The Royal Peacock ranking system illustrates how these knowledge systems are operationalized to meet certain goals, and how rather than being binary and oppositional, they influence each other.

One of the center’s major objectives is to promote the Queen’s Royal Peacock ranking system, which influences both production and marketing. On the Department of Sericulture website, the Peacock ranking system is explained as follows:

At the present time, when silk is imported to Thailand from other countries in legal and illegal manners, silk thread of high and low quality can be found. When low quality threads are used to weave Thai silk, they cause the quality of the Thai silk to decrease. Nevertheless, producers still affix Thai brands to their cloths, which causes domestic and international consumer confidence to decrease. The queen has carefully considered this issue, and has graciously offered a solution through the Royal Peacock ranking system.⁴

One area of the center’s outdoor exhibitions is devoted to the ranking system, explaining each of the four levels, the highest of which is “Gold – Royal Thai Silk.” Silks that receive “Gold” seals must be made from native silkworms in both the warp and weft. The silk must be hand-spun using simple tools, woven with a “folk style” hand loom, and dyed with either natural ingredients or chemicals that do not harm the environment. The “purity” of cloth decreases down the system.

This royal hierarchy of silk cloth can be understood in various ways. First, the system aims to regulate the choices of weavers by circumscribing their options if they seek to maximize their profits, as the presence of a Gold or Silver seal on a piece of silk raises its price significantly and marks it as a luxury good. Furthermore, by submitting their silks for Royal Peacock inspection, weavers pay respect and offer symbolic tribute to Queen Sirikit.

Most weavers I have spoken with in Surin do not submit their silks for examination at the center, explaining that getting Gold or Silver seals is too difficult. Many weavers use flying shuttle looms, chemical dyes, and silk thread of mixed origins to save time and money. A center technician noted that local people have a hard time completing the paperwork that must be submitted along with the cloth. Older weav-



The silkworm statue at the entrance to the Queen Sirikit Sericulture Center of Surin. Photo by Pisut Srimok.

ers in Surin, who do fully engage in the natural dyeing and hand-weaving processes, often cannot read or write in Thai, and they speak Khmer in their daily lives. These language barriers prevent them from accessing the benefits of the ranking system, and the center has not yet developed any support services for these weavers.

The ranking levels bring to the fore the essence of “authentic,” unadulterated, pure Thai silk, as perceived by the queen, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Department of Sericulture. This aestheticization of labor implicitly requires silk to be woven in an individual home in the most “traditional” of manners. Silk is literally only fit for the queen if it meets these conditions and thereby reflects certain qualities of ideal subjects, including self-sufficiency and female industriousness. In addition, the rankings dictate that silk is only Thai if it is woven from the threads of Thai silkworm breeds; worms that come from outside pose a threat to the integrity of Thai silk.



Yai Saum, a natural dye expert and skilled weaver, sits at her loom (a folk style hand loom) at home in Surin Province.

The Sericulture Center's Peacock exhibit is located in a pavilion that also houses a display about natural dyeing techniques in Surin. Khmer-Surin weavers are recognized nationally for their knowledge about natural dyes, and many species of local plants are called upon to transform skeins of raw beige silk into deep jewel-toned strands. When weavers talk about their dyeing methods, their words are a mixture of Thai and Khmer. Much knowledge about natural dyeing is articulated using Khmer, and Khmer words and meanings give dyes and their ingredients a significance that they lack in the Thai context.

The display does not include any of these meanings or beliefs about dyes, such as the hiding and revealing capabilities of lac (the resinous insect secretions used to make red), or the way that indigo must be "raised" and "nourished" as a living being. Instead, raw materials are confined in fiberglass cubes and described on posters that bear the scientific and Thai names of plants as well as technical information about specific plant properties that result in distinct colors. Visitors can touch skeins of naturally dyed thread that hang from a horizontal bar. By placing the natural dyeing exhibit in the same pavilion as the Royal Peacock display, the center establishes a relationship between the two topics and encompasses natural dyeing within the Peacock ranking system, erasing local weavers' connections to and knowledge of this practice. Surin weavers' hands, their skin cracked and saturated

with navy blue and scarlet red deposits, are absent from this knowledge assemblage.

Although Thai silk is "Thai" to the queen and state agencies by virtue of its thread composition and means of production, local weavers in Surin also attach a great deal of importance to patterns. Khmer weavers in Surin take pride in their natural dyeing knowledge in addition to their mastery of *mat mi* patterns. One of the most recognizable *mat mi* patterns in Surin is *hol*, referred to by local people as the "Queen of Surin Silk." *Hol* is woven only in Khmer communities in Thailand, and most weavers assert that the name *hol* comes from the Khmer word *hor*, which means "to flow," due to the pattern's stripes and twisting shapes that unfurl across the fabric like running water. The *hol* pattern has come to signify Khmer-Surin identity, and it is donned by women and men alike, especially at weddings, on Buddhist holidays, or on local festival days. In contrast to the queen's ranking system, which elides ethnic or local weaver identity in favor of worm identity and asserts a national monolithic idea of "Thainess," the Queen of Surin Silks, *hol*, celebrates and reasserts silk's Khmerness as locally configured.

A final impact of the Peacock system that merits discussion is the emergence of similar ranking systems on a local scale that I will refer to as counter-labels. Appropriating the logic of the queen's system, female weaving cooperatives in Surin have created their own brands and labels to advertise





รายละเอียดสินค้า

ชื่อสินค้า ผ้าไหมมัดหมี่
 ผลิตด้วยผ้าไหม ตรานกยูงพระราชทาน
 นกยูงสี ทอง
 รหัสเลขที่ _____ ถึง _____
 ชื่อผู้ผลิต/กลุ่ม มัดหมี่โฮลโบราณ
ทอผ้าสิจรรวมชาติ
 วัน/เดือน/ปี ที่ผลิต _____
 ราคาจำหน่าย 1800 บาท

A silk hol scarf that has received a Gold - Royal Thai Silk Peacock Ranking.

Inset: A bride and groom are showered with petals at their wedding in Surin Province. The bride wears hol, as do many other guests at the wedding. Photo by Pisut Srimok.

their silks. For example, the Baan Tanongrak Women's Weaving Cooperative developed their label "Green Productions" to denote pieces of silk that are "organic," or naturally dyed and composed of all-natural silk threads. These weavers use hybrid threads and flying shuttle looms instead of hand looms as well as silk from native worms, properties that exclude their silks from the Gold and Silver Peacock categories. Weavers in this cooperative don't seem to feel that this exclusion is an obstacle to increased sales and profit. Instead, they approach the marketing of their silks creatively and perhaps even subversively.

Although the Sericulture Center of Surin is staffed by individuals who are passionate about silk and interested in communicating more effectively with local weavers, the disconnect is apparent between the center as an institution and the community that surrounds it. Staff comprehend silk production through technical-scientific discourses, which in turn support the commoditization of silk and its reputation as a

luxury material. These approaches also help to reinforce the concept of weaving as a static, traditional activity embodying Thai female diligence and family self-sufficiency.

While scientific discourses are indeed forms of knowledge that move and mobilize across scale and context, they can also become stuck and exclude. Science as a "bridge of universal truths" leads to nowhere for Surin weavers, as the bridge that has been constructed on a local and national scale is one composed of Royal Peacock labels and shimmering "Thai" silks.⁵ Although many weavers in Surin are determined to maintain and transmit their weaving knowledge and skills, and are creatively redefining national marketing strategies as evidenced by "Green Productions," their efforts may be increasingly thwarted as the national push towards luxury markets and international investment intensifies. The Sericulture Center's giant, imposing silkworm may end up driving away the very individuals it should seek to welcome and learn from. 🐛

NOTES

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- 2 Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).
- 3 Peter Vail, "Thailand's Khmer As 'Invisible Minority': Language, Ethnicity, and Cultural Politics in Northeastern Thailand," *Asian Ethnicity* 8, no. 2 (2007): 111–130.
- 4 The Queen Sirikit Department of Sericulture. "What Is the Queen's Royal Peacock Brand?" (in Thai). Accessed December 10, 2014. http://qsds.go.th/qthaisilk_center/inside.php?com_option=page&aid=314&sub=314&site=tak.
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From Sandstone to Selfie Sticks at Shwe Sandaw

Experiencing Pagan in Seven Steps

In some way that I can't define to you, the whole life
and spirit of Burma is summed up in the way that girl
twists her arms. When you see her you can see the rice fields,
the villages under the teak trees, the pagodas, the priests in their yellow robes,
the buffaloes swimming the rivers in the early morning, Thibaw's palace . . .

—George Orwell, *Burmese Days*



Kaja McGowan
SEAP director



From twisted arms to Thibaw's palace, seven scenes spill from George Orwell's *pwe* dancer in *Burmese Days*. It is not the first time that a writer of Orwell's stature has subsumed an entire country into the body of a dancing girl. But the seven highly exotic stills, including the dancer in motion, are striking none the less (fig. 1)—especially, as I find myself visually transported, standing before a 12th century sandstone sculpture from Kubyauk-gyi temple in Myinkaba village revealing the Birth of the Buddha-to-be (fig. 2). It is my first day in Pagan, an excursion made possible in part by an internationalizing grant from Einaudi intended to foster SEAP faculty at Cornell to establish partnerships and exchanges in Myanmar. I have come to this historical site with my former student Chotima Chaturawong (now a beloved professor of architecture at Silpakorn University in Thailand) to the Archaeological Museum (fig. 3). We are following the advice of its deputy director of archaeology, who maintains that a trip to the museum is requisite before walking about in Pagan; otherwise we might “waste our steps.”



Figure 1: *Pwe* dancer as marionette. From publicity poster for the Mandalay Marionette Theater.

Carved in sandstone, and standing with her right arm twisted seductively above her head (not unlike Orwell's dancer), Queen Maya grasps the branch of an overarching tree while giving birth to the bodhisattva, Prince Siddhartha (future Buddha-to-Be). According to legend, the newborn prince immediately stood up and strode seven spaces, leaving lotuses in his wake and declaring with finger pointed to the sky that this would be his last birth and that he was destined for enlightenment. At Borobudur, in central Java, the Buddha-to-Be is shown straddling lotus-filled pots three and five, en route toward that seventh step. He looks back longingly at the possibility for future rebirth, as if hesitant to fulfill his final reincarnation. In Thailand and Burma, however, the journey is often shown completed (fig. 4). Miniature sculptures of infants with their right pointer finger raised are read-



Figure 2: Birth of the Buddha-to-be. Kubyauk-gyi temple, Myinkaba village. Pagan period 1198. Sandstone. (111.1X65.4X39.4 cm.). Pagan Archaeological Museum. Postcard purchased from the museum shop on the front steps.

ily available in Bangkok’s amulet market, a precocious testament to young Siddhartha’s conviction, the actual seven steps toward enlightenment understood and, therefore, eclipsed from visibility. Whether accentuated by flowering lotuses or not, those initial strides have always intrigued me, not just the decisiveness in one so young, but also the incremental journey itself.

In this sandstone carving at the museum in Pagan, however, a longer and more convoluted series of visual steps are at play (fig. 2). Queen Maya’s seemingly well-rubbed belly and undulating pose, as witnessed by her sister to her left, is a study in replication as a stream of pocket-sized images—like clay votive tablets primed for pilgrims’ purchase—are unleashed. Each version of the Buddha-to-Be sits in lotus position with hands joined palm to palm in *anjali mudra*.



Figure 3: Wood and bronze statues of the Buddha to Be, proclaiming his final life on earth at a shrine at Wat Pha Lat, a small statue-rich Buddhist temple and monastery, nestled in the forest, just a few kilometers down the mountain from Wat Prathat Doi Suthep in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

While the first to emerge sits at a rakish angle on Maya’s right hip, the rest of the seated bodhisattvas descend level by level through a golden net held in the up-stretched arms of Buddhist deities, antelope skins provided by guardians, and cloth proffered by mortals. And finally at the base of the sculpture, to the right of Maya’s squared-off toes, the bodhisattva stands confidently on a pedestal, his much-anticipated seven strides a foregone conclusion.

These materially charged realms of sand and stone, animal skin, and woven cloth, though merely suggested in this work of art, continue to resonate long after we step out of the dark and gloomy air-conditioned vestibule of the museum and into the sun- and sand-strewn streets of Pagan (fig. 5). Once a ninth-century settlement perched on the Irrawaddy River, the Kingdom of Pagan in tandem with the Khmer Empire extended its reach and rose to prominence in mainland Southeast Asia by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Marco Polo described Pagan’s landscape, bristling with its 13,000 monasteries and pagodas, as a gilded city alive with the sound of bells and the swishing currents of monks’ robes.



Figure 4 (Top): Author (left) with Professor of Architecture, Dr. Chotima Chaturawong on a visit to Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, where I was graciously received by the dean and faculty on July 24, 2015.



Figure 5 (Below): View of Pagan.

Subdued by comparison, today Pagan's streets unfold before us as we direct our steps toward the village of Myinkaba in search of Kubyauk-gyi Temple, a cave pagoda built in 1113 CE. This pagoda served as the original "home" to the sandstone stele of Queen Maya giving birth to the Buddha-to-Be (fig. 2), one of forty-two sculptures that once graced its arches and cloistered vaults. Due to a series of thefts, followed by a campaign aimed toward preservation on the part of the museum, only nineteen sculptures remain in situ, enhanced by exquisite murals depicting, among other things, the previous lives of the Buddha and his disciples. As part of our itinerary for the day, after a tour of Kubyauk-gyi, we intend to join the mad rush of visitors to the fifth terrace of Shwe Sandaw, a favored site from which to view the sun setting on the Irrawaddy River.

A vocabulary drawn from geology seems especially appropriate here in Pagan, where many households in Myinkaba, for example, have bounded yards defined by local stone. Here, the rough-hewn rock of preference would appear to be petrified wood, found in abundance throughout

the area. This magical material, with its wood grain still tantalizingly manifest, creates a glittering net that resonates everywhere, from sacred environs to the floors of the lacquer-ware workshops in Myinkaba. Indeed, as we visit the workshop of Mya Thit Sar, we learn that the finest polish on these pagoda-like offering vessels (*hsun-ok*) in cinnabar red and black lacquered wood is achieved by patiently sanding the surfaces with powdered fossilized wood (fig. 6).

As Chotima and I navigate the path to Kubyauk-gyi Temple, such highly polished lacquer-ware hounds our steps in the persistent rattle of multiple bangles gracing the wrists of a young Myinkaba schoolgirl (fig. 7). She shadows our every move, practicing her English, as she escorts us somewhat aggressively to the pagoda's entrance (fig. 8). Her cheeks and nose are daubed with *tanaka* paste derived from a tree by the same name that flourishes in almost every household's yard throughout the country. For touristic pleasure, branches of *tanaka* are cut and sold in the market in tandem with round grinding stones. The powdered wood-dust, acquired from the circular motion of *tanaka* sticks ground on stone, is then



Figure 6: Shining examples of lacquerware from Mya Thit Sar Handicraft Shop and Factory, Myinkaba village, Pagan, Myanmar.



Figure 7: Young girl selling lacquer-ware bangles for her family in front of Kubyauk-gyi temple, Myinkaba village, Pagan, Myanmar.

mixed with water until it becomes a fine paste. When thinly applied to the skin as a poultice, the sweet-smelling substance is said to protect the wearer from the harmful effects of the sun. We contemplate the price of tanaka-painted cheeks while removing our shoes and socks for the blistering hot circumambulation of the temple's environs.

Fortunately for us, red cloth has been unfurled along the pathways by invisible mortals hoping to ease our steps (fig. 9). Though the artists who worked on Pagan's monuments remain largely unsung, inscriptions remind us of the importance of cloth as a much-coveted currency. A reputable mason, Buddhalanka by name, was reportedly paid for his skilled services with four pieces of cloth and an elephant. In our case, the so-called invisible mortals turn out to be a family of artisans who paint traditional sand paintings on white cloth and have been allowed for generations to set up their workshop not far from the entrance to Kubyauk-gyi Temple. Their compositions hang on ropes about the sacred premises like colorful laundry. Many of the paintings are reminiscent of oversized postcards, revealing popular touristic fare—pago-



Figure 8: Entrance to Kubyauk-gyi temple, Myinkaba village, Pagan, Myanmar.



Figure 9 (Top): Entrance to Kubyauk-gyi is strewn with red cloth, protecting one's bare feet from the hot bricks along the path.
Figure 10 (Below): Shy painter holds up an original sand-painting of a seven-headed mythical elephant, adapted from 13th century murals found on temples at Pagan. Together with his sons, he sells his work from a studio/shop on the temple grounds at Kubyauk-gyi.

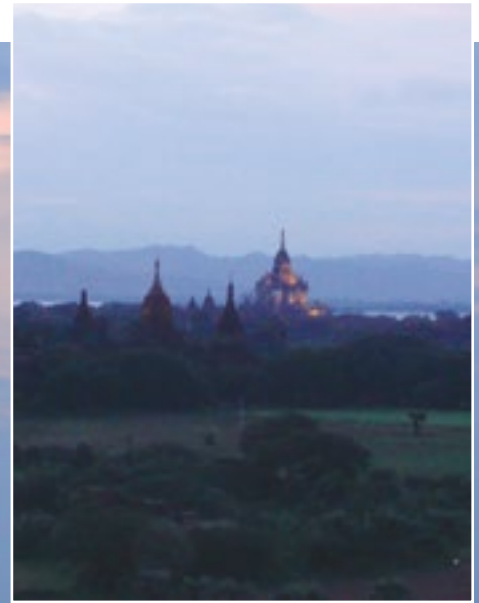
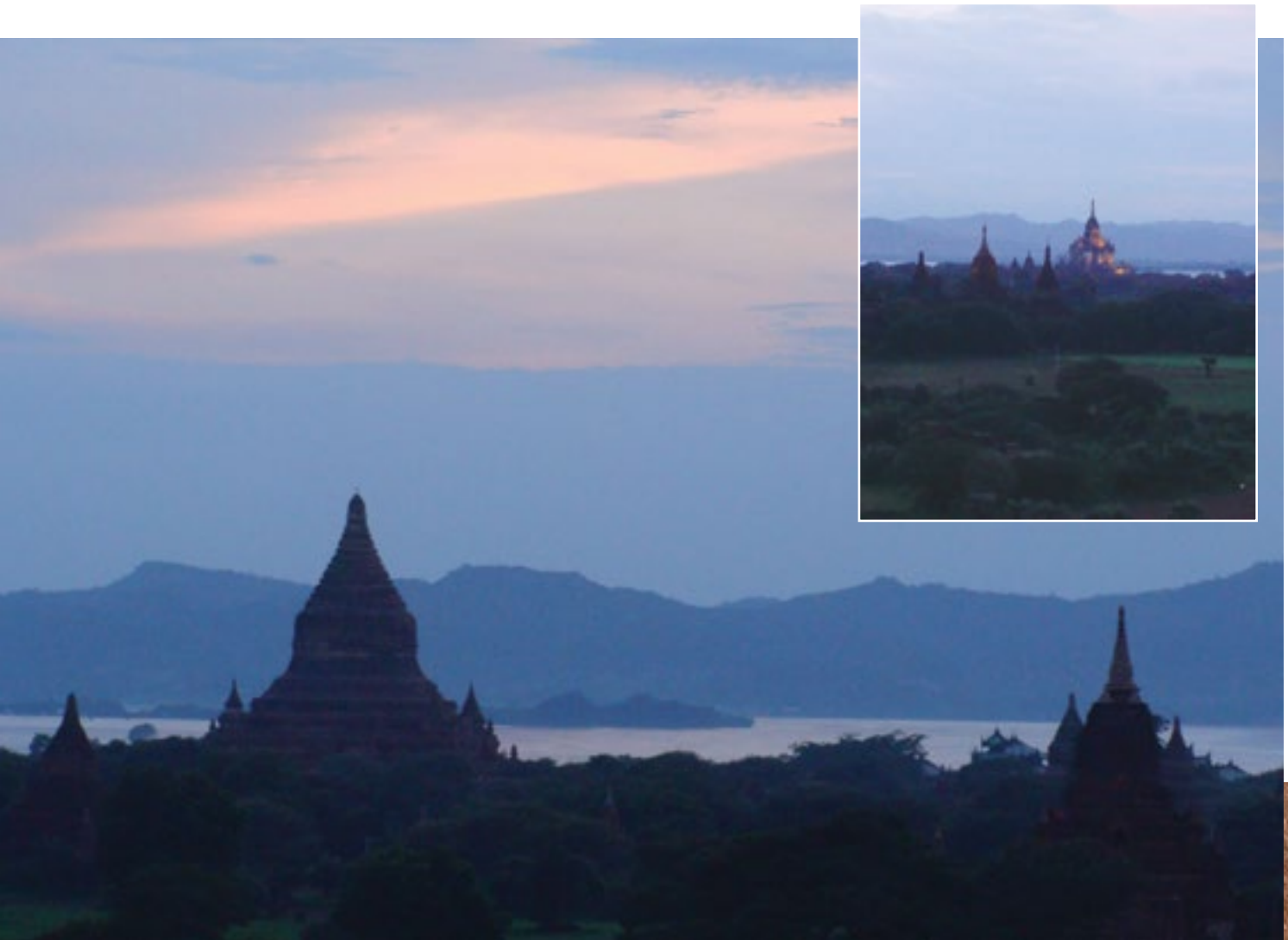
da-filled landscapes of Pagan at sunset, for example. More successful compositions, however, reflect themes drawn directly from the painted murals at the temple.

Introduced to us as the father of Ba Soe, one artist shyly holds up his composition when asked if it is possible to photograph him with his work (fig. 10).

Here glistening sand, animal skin, and cloth all converge in one painting based on a composite of thirteenth-century murals from Pagan. The flank and full anatomy of a mythological elephant with seven heads becomes the canvas for a narrative depicting various key moments in the life of the Buddha. While the artist points to each of the seven menacing trunks with the heads of serpents on their tips, he tells how sand for the paintings is dredged up from the Irrawaddy River. When dry, the granules are applied to the cloth with a fixative, thereby providing local artists with an ingenious way to replicate the surface effect of the murals on temple walls. Once a thin layer of sand is uniformly fixed, and dried in the sun, the composition can be first sketched in pencil and then outlined in ink. Brightly colored acrylic paint is then applied

to the ink composition. With visual sensibilities primed from the morning's excursion to the museum, I search on the body of the marauding elephant for the scene of Queen Maya, her sister, and the birth of the Buddha-to-Be. Quite appropriately, I find the vignette almost immediately on the elephant's back right flank, where Maya's arm is twisted above her head grasping the branch of an overarching tree. Though ambiguous in terms of iconography, the site of this scene is perhaps appropriate given that Queen Maya was said to have conceived following a dream of a white elephant with six tusks that descended from the night sky and then entered her womb through her right side.

Evening approaches and Chotima and I hurry off in sequences of seven steps to Shwe Sandaw, finding ourselves caught up in a seven-headed mass exodus of tourists, international and domestic, all converging with tusks bared on the multi-terraced pagoda built in 1057 CE by King Anawrahta. From the distance, a bell-shaped *stupa* can be seen clearly rising from the top terrace. All four sides of Shwe Sandaw have steep stairways leading to the top. After paying an entry



Figures 11-12: Sunset from Shwe Sandaw Temple, Pagan, Myanmar

fee, we join in the jostle of bodies up the stone steps, grasping onto recently installed metal railings as we go. We are determined to catch the sunset over Pagan (figs. 11, 12).

And here at last on the fifth terrace, I begin to wonder if the world's epicenter of selfie culture has suddenly converged on Shwe Sandaw. Selfies and their sticks are indeed a global phenomenon, but here in Pagan I am struck by how many of the perpetrators are Asian tourists, particularly domestic student groups from Yangon. As I write this in January 2016, it is with the knowledge that general elections were already held in Myanmar on November 8, 2015, and that Aung San Suu Kyi's National League of Democracy won in a landslide victory, earning the majority of seats in parliament, and thereby ending a half-century of dominance by the military. On August 4, 2015, however, the results of the Myanmar election were still unknown and there was a marked uneasiness in the air.

Returning to Shwe Sandaw by way of conclusion, I recall first feeling irritated by these rowdy pairs of grinning teenagers, obscuring the view with smartphones and selfie sticks

held aloft for those perfect shots. I confess that I rushed to judgment, interpreting their actions as self-centered and superficial, only to discover later, in conversation on the way down the stairs, from one Yangon student in particular (fig. 13) that snapping selfies for him and his classmates was part of a growing movement engaged in a bodhisattva-like way to improve the world. In a nation like Myanmar where religion and ethnicity have been, and continue to be incendiary issues, a selfie campaign by Myanmar students on a Buddhist monument like Shwe Sandaw seemed a unique twist. To combat religious and ethnic tensions by promoting cross-cultural friendships offered a rare counterpoint to the anti-Muslim rhetoric from some hard-line Buddhist monks. Spurred to action by the rising tide of hate speech, Yangon students were choosing to stride forth leaving "selfie flowers" in their wake. Arms twisted over their heads, and selfie sticks pointed toward the sky (fig. 14), each and every one was hoping for fair elections come November and other regenerative and redemptive possibilities. 🙏



Figure 13 (Inset): . Throng of tourists at Shwe Sandaw, Pagan. One student from Yangon, wielding his selfie stick in solidarity.
Figure 14: Brickwork along an axial passage, allowing pervasive light and hardy plants to grow, Pagan, Myanmar.



Performing Islam in Southeast Asia

Masjid Raya Baiturrahman (Baiturrahman Grand Mosque), 2009, Aceh, Indonesia.



Chiara Formichi
assistant professor of
Southeast Asian studies

This past summer, after a long motorbike ride out of Mandalay, in Myanmar, I finally found the shrine I was looking for. It housed the grave of Abid Shah Husayni, who lived in the late eighteenth century and is believed to be a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, via his daughter, Fatima, and her son Husayn. The place was in disarray, with several toppled tombstones, untended grass, and animals grazing about. But the shrine was very much alive, with fresh fruits and burning incense placed in front of the tomb. In a couple of days would be the anniversary of Husayni's birth, and I got invited to a *wilada* ceremony. Followers of a Sufi mystical fraternity were planning to come to the shrine to pray,

burn incense, give food offerings, play drums, and sing devotional songs.

But as Myanmar was preparing for its first open elections in decades, monks had been very outspoken about Myanmar's ethno-religious identity, claiming that its Buddhist character should be protected vis-à-vis the perceived growth of Muslim influence. As a consequence, none of those celebrations in honor of Abid Shah Husayni actually took place. The Myanmar government, under pressure from the monks, had withdrawn the necessary permits to hold the public service.

In March 2014, Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 disappeared off the radar. Soon after, Ibrahim Mat Zin showed up at Kuala Lumpur International Air-



Shrine of Abid Shah Husayni, 2015, Amarapura, Mandalay (Myanmar).

port (KLIA) to “weaken the bad spirits” and thus facilitate the search and rescue operations to find the plane. Mat Zin is a *bomoh*, a shaman of the Malay Peninsula, a role which gives him some traction among the rural population or other traditionally minded Malays. At the same time, however, some politicians contend that Malaysia is an Islamic state—Islamic law is officially implemented in several states of the federation, Malay Bibles are burnt when the Christian god is referred to as Allah, and the state has the authority to determine which form of Islam is acceptable (Sunni Shafi’i) and which is not (Shia and Ahmadi).

Both vignettes, as different as they are in the details, open windows on

the idea of “performing” a religion. Islam is performed artistically and ritually as Myanmar’s Muslims sing *Qawwali* tunes of South Asian origins. Religious-cultural exchanges are performed as “Buddhist” offerings of incense and food are placed at a Muslim shrine in Myanmar and as the *bomoh* moves forward in his rituals at KLIA. Sectarianism is rejected as Sunni Muslims celebrate the birth of a Shiite figure in Mandalay, but is embraced by the Malaysian state.

Buddhism and Islam are both performed as majority identity markers in the political sphere, and governments curb the freedoms of minority groups such as the Muslims of Myanmar and Malaysia’s Christians and non-Sunni

Muslims. My course, “Performing Islam in Southeast Asia,” draws a path that helps us figure out in what ways the framework of “performance” is useful for understanding Islam or any other religion. Ritual and the arts are the most obvious but not the only fields of application. Isn’t politics all about acting?

Some Malays were quite taken by the *bomoh*’s presence at KLIA, but is he a Muslim figure or a vestige of pre-Islamic Malay culture? And how does this play out given that “Malayness” is defined, by law, in Islamic terms? In Myanmar, as I observed drumming and singing in devotion to a Sufi master, I couldn’t help but wonder how this intersects with the opinion of those Muslims

who argue that music is *haram*, forbidden, in Islam. Then, I asked myself, can a rock band sing Islamic tunes? Is the enactment of a Malay trance dance with Hindu roots Islamic? Is a painting of the Prophet Muhammad necessarily “blasphemous”? Why do some politicians claim that Malaysia is an Islamic state? Who decides if a given practice is “orthodox”?

Teaching “Performing Islam in Southeast Asia” is an ongoing learning experience for me. As a group, the class challenges, questions, and engages with the ways in which we perceive whether a ritual, an artistic performance, a piece of art, a law or policy, a political decision, a garment, etc., is Islamic or not. We delve into the question of whether and why it’s important for some to claim a practice’s Islamic roots. Such intricacies open windows and doors on the details of the Islamic faith, as the

five pillars of religious practice and the ways in which Islamic laws are extrapolated from the scriptures, for example, become necessary tools in this quest. How did Islam reach its farthest periphery, and why does answering such a question still matter today? Answers change as we move from Muslim-majority countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei), to those Muslim minority communities seemingly scattered across the region in southern Thailand, southern Philippines, Myanmar, Singapore, and in the Mekong Delta, between Cambodia and Vietnam.

I was trained in the fields of Islamic studies and Southeast Asian history, and much of my research looks at how Muslims in this “periphery” of the Islamic lands approach religion. Southeast Asia is seemingly far removed from Islam’s Arabian center, yet Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the

world. About a quarter of the Muslim population resides in Southeast Asia, and 60 percent in Asia more broadly.

Understanding Islam in Asia is crucial to understanding Islam, and, in turn, an understanding of Asia would only be partial if we ignore Islam. I find Southeast Asia to be a fascinating microcosm for the varieties of Islamic manifestations that reverberate across Asia, while being a spatially more manageable geography to examine. The region is a crossroads between South and East Asia. Through the centuries it absorbed “foreign” cultural and religious traditions and reframed them in local terms. Southeast Asia is home to peoples of all faiths and governments of all political orientations. This makes it a perfect field for the investigation of “performance.”



One of the joys of teaching at Cornell is being able to integrate in-classroom teaching with the stimulating resources available on campus and the rich variety of events held each semester. Besides lectures and class discussions, “Performing Islam in Southeast Asia” takes full advantage of the opportunities Cornell offers to advance understanding of the topic outside the classroom setting. Last year students in my course listened to Gamelan music in Lincoln Hall, attended a South Indian dance performance in Bailey Hall, and traveled to New York City to watch Sumatran dancing and to investigate how the Metropolitan Museum’s new Islamic art galleries relate to Southeast Asia. This year students in the course will spend time at the Johnson Museum and the Rare and Manuscript Collection at Kroch Library as well as engage in other related activities and events as they arise on and off campus throughout the semester. In the Cornell course catalog, “Performing Islam in Southeast Asia” is listed as ASIAN 3311 and ASIAN 6611, co-listed as RELST 3311 and NES 3511. It is generally taught in the spring semester.



From Chance Encounters to Collaborative Exchange: Forming Community at the 2015 Burma/Myanmar Research Forum



Allegra Giovine
PhD candidate at the University
of Pennsylvania and 2015-2016
exchange scholar at Cornell
University

I first learned of an energized group of junior Burma/Myanmar scholars when, back in July 2014, a colleague tipped me off about an event this group was holding later that year. I had recently finished my candidacy exams in history of science at the University of Pennsylvania and was spending that summer preparing for a year of archival research in the United Kingdom. The event was scheduled for the same month that I had to pack my bags and head overseas, but—promising critical engagement on the future of Burma/Myanmar studies (around which my research had been ruminating for years), and held at my own alma mater (Cornell)—it just looked too good to pass up. I was on a flight back to the United States that October to share some of my work at the Burma/Myanmar Research Forum: an event well worth the extra transatlantic journey.

Back at Cornell, I was surrounded by an extremely dynamic group of scholars whose research and personal commitments all led to Burma. Their origin stories forced me to reflect on my own: the roots planted at Cornell studying Burmese as a student of linguistics, and the twists and turns that led to my dissertation on Burmese scientific understandings of wealth and economy in the colonial period. Moreover, narrating this pathway made me keenly aware that this research, which largely originates from my training in the history of economics and postcolonial studies of vernacular science, had up until that point been formulated in an intellectual environment in which Burma/Myanmar scholars were usually chance encounters. For

*Above: Burmese martial arts workshop.
Inset: Steven Rubin discusses his
documentary photo collection,
Borderline Existence.*



Stephen Campbell speaks during Q&A with Wai Wai Nu, director and founder of Women Peace Network, Arakan.

myself and for many others, the forum felt like something of an experimental gathering. But as we shared notes from the margins (be they disciplinary, institutional, or otherwise), it laid the foundations for longer-term discussions about new scholarship and the future of the field.

One year later, in October 2015, these discussions resurfaced in another vibrant gathering of Burma/Myanmar scholars, again held at Cornell. From October 2 to 4, the Southeast Asia Program, with the support of the Departments of Anthropology, Development Sociology, and Government, hosted the second Burma/Myanmar Research Forum. The 2015 forum titled “Borders, Bounds, and Brinks” sprouted from conversations following immediately on the heels of the inaugural 2014 event, in which many of the organizers—graduate students from Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, McGill, and University of Pennsylvania—were involved as participants.¹ The theme for the 2015 forum took borders and boundaries as central topics of inquiry, and beginning Friday October 2, over fifty Burma and Southeast Asia specialists, ranging from young academics to senior scholars, gathered at the Kahin Center for Advanced Research on Southeast Asia for a week-end of plenary discussions and intensive workshoping on the theme “Borders, Bounds, and Brinks: Rethinking Boundaries in and about Burma/Myanmar.”

Plenary speakers Penny Edwards (University of California, Berkeley), Tin Maung Maung Than (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore), and Alicia Turner (York University, Toronto) quickly complicated the story of Burma’s borders on Friday afternoon. This opening session traced a history of dynastic and post-dynastic Burma through the dispersed fragments of a royal prince (Edwards); magnified the inclusionary-exclusionary politics that have generated divisions in Myanmar from the 1947 Panglong Agreement to the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (Tin Maung Maung Than); and recast Buddhism as an agent of mobility and cosmopolitanism, uniting ostensibly marginal religious sites with colonial Burma’s central spaces of worship (Turner). Together, all three speakers reconfigured familiar boundary lines, highlighting new methodological and ontological possibilities for Burma’s social and geographical borderlands.

These reconfigurations set the stage for parallel sessions held all day Saturday. Considered the main event for the weekend, these workshop sessions were facilitated by the

forum’s plenary speakers and featured in-depth discussion of works-in-progress from twenty-four colleagues who traveled to Cornell from Asia, Europe, and North America to share and discuss their work. Included among them were not only historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists, but also scholars of law, cultural geography, education, and critical international studies, to name just a few.

Prior to the forum, workshop participants had shared papers and extensive comments with their peers, whose works-in-progress ranged from topics as diverse as eighteenth-century Sino-Burmese borderland cartography (Arina Mikhalevskaya, Moscow State University) to literacy practices and cultural identity among immigrant youth from Myanmar (Kyaw Win Tun, University of Wisconsin, Madison). The workshops provided space for critical discussion of individual projects, methodological and theoretical quandaries, and the future of Burma/Myanmar studies.

Research questions generated during Saturday’s workshop groups overflowed into Sunday morning’s plenary “Dialogue on Methods and Ethics.” Kevin Foley (Cornell, government) and Alicia Turner introduced digital initiatives and techniques, including Burmese language encoding practices (Foley) and archival digitization efforts (Turner). Greg Green (curator, Echols Collection on Southeast Asia) also contributed information about cataloging and acquisitions efforts at several (physical and virtual) library repositories.

The conversation then turned to ethics and the politics of doing research in Myanmar—topics that, despite the early hour of 9 a.m., inspired lively debate. Colleagues shared practices, experiences, and expectations relating to “performing as academics” (i.e., how academic discourse often gets embroiled in non-academic power contestations); the possibilities for disseminating research in Burmese through bilingual journals; and the ethics of confidentiality, in which Rose Metro (Cornell PhD and independent scholar) shared emerging methods of face-to-face consent.²

The forum also provided space for artistic and activist expression, beginning Friday evening with a screening of films curated from the 2014 and 2015 Human Rights Human Dignity International Film Festival (HRDIFF) in Myanmar. In addition to the 2014–2015 films, which were shown at the Schwartz Center for Performing Arts with special sponsorship from the Department of Performing and Media Arts, was one 2013 HRDIFF film by Ithaca local and Burma researcher Rhoda Linton. Her co-produced *Whistle for Help* documents how a small women’s action committee led a campaign to stop female harassment on buses in Yangon.

Throughout the weekend, Steven Rubin’s documentary photograph collection, *Borderline Existence*, was on display at the Kahin Center. This exhibition is based on Rubin’s Fulbright-sponsored research in Mizoram, India, and sheds light on Chin immigrants who crossed the Myanmar/India border to escape poverty and persecution, and who now constitute one of Mizoram’s most marginalized populations. Rubin (Penn State, University Park) gave a guided tour Sunday morning, and the photographs spoke volumes about the social and material conditions of a set of truly borderline existences.

One striking photograph depicted a Chin man clearing overgrown plants at the Sojourner Cemetery: a hard to reach site where Chin are forced to bury their dead. Bodies of Chin people are excluded from the major cemetery in Lunglei, and while viewers' eyes rested on the care of the dead, Rubin noted how "many Chins count these obstacles to proper burial among their most painful experiences in Mizoram." After the forum, *Borderline Existence* was also featured at the Mario Einaudi Center for International Education Week in mid-November and at Mann Library for display through the end of 2015.

Later Sunday morning, forum participants heard from Wai Wai Nu, a Rohingya activist and the director and founder of Women Peace Network – Arakan. With Chiara Formichi (Cornell, Asian studies) moderating, Wai Wai Nu spoke of the dire circumstances facing Rohingya people in Myanmar and how the treatment of Muslim minorities has changed for the worse since she was imprisoned for political expression a decade ago. In addition to these timely and pressing conversations, the forum also incorporated cultural activities facilitated by Cornell colleagues. These included Burmese language practice by Yu Yu Khaing (Asian Studies) and Thet Hein Tun (City and Regional Planning), and a Burmese martial arts workout by M.J. Mosereiff (SEAP, and co-organizer of the 2014 forum).³

In the months since the forum, several attendees have generously shared their thoughts. Marie de Rugy (Université Paris 1-Sorbonne) noted the benefit of hearing from Burma studies colleagues who approach their topics from distinct geographical and institutional vantage points (e.g., China, India, British Empire), thereby facilitating a collaborative perspective on a transnational Burma/Myanmar. Busarin Lertchavalitsakul (Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research) commented that the format of this event enabled scholars with distinct disciplinary and methodological leanings to engage in rich exchanges "under the umbrella of Burma/Myanmar studies." Rose Metro (independent scholar) echoed these thoughts, noting how "disciplines have varying criteria for what counts as data, how data is analyzed, how the researcher's positionality is taken into account." She observed how, at the forum, "people were really forced to make clear their assumptions."

On the topic of ethics, Stephen Campbell (Trent University) highlighted how critical it was to problematize the ethics of academic research and the frequently privileged position of the foreign scholar. On methodology, co-organizer Nabila Islam (McGill University) noted how helpful it was to discuss the enormous amounts of gray literature produced by non-governmental organizations and the methodological hurdles



The audience looking at Steven Rubin's photo exhibition.

and opportunities surrounding its use. And on the politics of research, several colleagues shared their appreciation of discussion on the sensitivities of how we frame our work—even if it is deeply historical. Despite the breadth of research in this scholarly community, no one should refrain from (what one colleague called) "anticipating simplifications" that their work might undergo when it moves outside university walls.

As an organizer of the 2015 forum and an exchange scholar at Cornell (and Ithaca local again) for the 2015–2016 academic year, this event struck me because of the intellectual intensity and personal warmth emanating from its participants. Finding one another from all of our niche disciplinary backgrounds, and engaging on the possibilities and uncertainties—practical or theoretical—of Burma/Myanmar research, is a vital part of our scholarship. As a junior Burma/Myanmar studies scholar myself, I am inspired by the intellectual currency being exchanged among members of this eclectic community. Not only do these collaborations feed back into our own fields—qualifying theoretical compulsions and sometimes provoking the disciplinary status quo—they also make possible multiple, simultaneous narrations of both Burmese history and present-day Myanmar.

At the end of the forum, we heard similar remarks from Yasuyuki Kono, director of Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), who presented an overview of related research happening at CSEAS. His talk reinforced the forum's larger goal of creating a community of scholars that is intellectually and institutionally broad and yet, simultaneously, knit tightly enough together to form a creative union of thought and practice. This union will remain critical going forward, as more researchers cross over the Burma/Myanmar border, and new questions and anxieties confront both Burma/Myanmar and the scholarship generated to understand it.^{4,5}

NOTES

- 1 The organizing committee for the 2015 forum included Aye Min Thant (Cornell, Asian studies); Hilary Olivia Faxon (Cornell, development sociology); Kevin Foley (Cornell, government); Allegra Giovine (Univ. of Penn., history and sociology of science); Oradi Inkhong (Cornell, anthropology); Nabila Islam (McGill, political science); Mary Kate Long (Harvard, theological studies); Mai Van Tran (Cornell, government); Soe Lin Aung/Geoffrey Myint (Columbia, anthropology); Thet Hein Tun (Cornell, city and regional planning); and Youyi Zhang (Cornell, government).
- 2 For more detailed discussion, see Lisa Brooten and Rosalie Metro, "Thinking About Ethics in Burma Research," *Journal of Burma Studies* 18 (2014): 1–22.
- 3 The "Burmese language tables" are an ongoing activity at Cornell. All levels are welcome. For more information, please email Thet Hein Tun (Hein) at tt478@cornell.edu.
- 4 If you're interested and have not yet filled out the Burma Studies Academics Survey (run by Alicia Turner, on behalf of the *Journal of Burma Studies*, the Center for Burma Studies at Northern Illinois University, and partners), please contact SEAP (seap@cornell.edu) to get the link.
- 5 On behalf of all the organizers, we would like to once again thank Kaja McGowan (director, SEAP) for opening the forum and all SEAP faculty and staff advisors for their support of the Myanmar Initiative; Thamora Fishel (associate director, SEAP) for all of her direct support as the 2015 forum took shape; the 2014 organizing committee for initiating this forum series; the Einaudi Center and partners for their sponsorship; and all of our speakers, workshop presenters, and observers for their great energy surrounding this event.

A Layered Perspective:



Ethel Angeli T. Roxas
undergraduate student in the
College of Human Ecology

*What a strange thing to change
and not to be transformed. To be
exactly as I was and yet not so.*

—Gina Apostol, *Gun Dealers' Daughter*

• 28 •

*Ethel admiring ampalaya, or bitter melon—an edible
fruit widely grown in the Philippines, Summer 2014.*

Exploring My Identity through Filipino History and Literature

Tacloban City, Philippines, eight months after Typhoon Haiyan, Summer 2014.

I am Filipino American, but I have not always claimed this identity with certainty. I was born in New York and raised in New Jersey because my parents believed in the American Dream and wanted us to have a better life. Throughout childhood I was immersed in Filipino culture. I remember my mother, Abigail, used to laugh and cry while watching Filipino *teleseryes*, or soap operas, while my father, Senen, cooked his own version of spicy *Bicolano* recipes. Growing up amidst this cultural backdrop, I thought of myself as a true Filipino without really knowing what that meant. However, I still took great pride in my roots. In high school I was motivated to learn Tagalog songs, but did not bother to learn their meaning. I even performed traditional folk dances just to put on a show. On some level, I knew that I lacked a deeper understanding of my culture.

When I came to study my major in human biology, health, and society at Cornell, along with my minors in global health and Southeast Asian studies, everything changed. In my freshman year I enrolled in introductory Tagalog for two semesters and became an active member of the Cornell Filipino Association. I got a taste of what it means to be Filipino American, but I wanted to learn more. In my second year, I took two courses with Asian Studies professor Arnika Fuhrmann called Introduction to Southeast Asia and Gender and Sexuality in Southeast Asian Cinema. These two classes exposed me to a new way of critical thinking, especially since their subject matter fell outside my familiar realm of the hard sciences. One of the readings in the introductory course that focused on the Philippines was Gina Apostol's historical fic-

tion novel, *Gun Dealers' Daughter*. Within the first few pages, I was fascinated by the main character's scattered memories of the past and wanted to figure out how they fit in with her present self. This was my chance, I thought, to dig deeper into my own ancestry.

Gun Dealers' Daughter portrays the life of a young woman named Soledad whose family provides firearms to military officers during martial law under the Marcos regime (1972–1981). At this time in the Philippines, the military government had complete power over the people. Curfews were set, and if people disobeyed or spoke wrongfully against Ferdinand Marcos and his officials, they would be held prisoner. Despite the dangers, a powerful insurgency took root. Soledad has a fiery spirit and is swept away by the camaraderie of the revolution. Later in life, she attempts to connect the pieces of her dark past despite having trauma-induced amnesia. "When the day came," says Sol, "that I could write whole paragraphs, tentative, one-storied stories, linked sentences in a coherent void, my vertigo stopped. Rooms stabilized. Objects stayed in place." Throughout the book, Apostol mentions several objects—a tulip bud or a book—that trigger Soledad's memories and aid in her mental health recovery.¹

There is a famous *ubuntu* saying from South Africa that consistently comes up in my global health courses: "I am because we are." In everything that I do, I remember that I could not have gotten to this point in my life without my friends, family, and Filipino ancestors. Reading Apostol's novel inspired me to ask my parents more details about their history.

Both of my parents lived through martial law and the corruption of the Marcos regime in the 1980s. My mother was



Left: The devastating effects of Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban City, Philippines, Summer 2014. Right: Dr. Frederic Gleach curating the Anthropology Exhibit in honor of Filipino American History Month, October 2015. Photo taken by Sierra Jamir.

living in Cebu at the time, a good 350 miles from the capital, so she was spared some of the harsher effects of these politics. My father, however, lived in Manila and actively took part in the demonstrations for the People Power Revolution. He said that the call to fight, or *laban*, was broadcast through the radios. The brother of slain opposition leader Ninoy Aquino was the spokesperson for the protests. He urged the public to flood the streets and peacefully walk along the city's main thoroughfare, Epifanio de los Santos Avenue. My father said that people chanted "Tama na. Sobra na" —meaning "Stop, that's too much; enough is enough," as they walked.²

"The most remarkable part of the demonstration," recounted my father, "was when the nuns would lie down on the ground in front of the military tanks." He felt a sense of unification and empowerment in these times. My father always reminds me that there is great power in numbers. He was proud to take part in this revolution and said that "the best part was knowing that you made a dent on the Marcos regime."³

Just as specific objects, books included, aided Soledad in recovering her memory, Apostol's novel helped me to initiate a dialogue with my parents about their past. Then during the fall 2015 semester, I had another opportunity to learn more about my cultural heritage. In honor of Filipino American history month, Dr. Frederic Gleach, senior lecturer and curator of the Anthropology Collections at Cornell, created an elegant presentation at McGraw Hall of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century items used for weaponry and domestic life during the Filipino-American War. The artifacts exhibited were carefully chosen to illustrate the life of the people at this time. There were shields and machetes juxtaposed with spoons, forks, woven hats, and clothes. The curator vividly brought each selected object to life. Although the origins of some items remain unknown, it was fascinating to imagine what life in the Philippines would have been like when these

objects were in use. I wondered if my parents had ever seen any of them.

Gina Apostol was among the attendees. I noticed she was drawn to three objects of domestic life—a comb, a broom, and a woven hat—items, she said, that linked to moments of her past experiences. An intimate discussion with Apostol and a few other members of the Cornell Filipino Association followed the exhibit. I was able to ask her questions about her book, and we had a thought-provoking discussion, especially about women's empowerment and sexual agency, two main themes in *Gun Dealers' Daughter*. Our conversation later veered toward a larger discussion of women's sexuality, especially in the Philippines.

The next day, after meeting Apostol for the first time, I attended a talk she gave sponsored by the Southeast Asia Program called "The Filipino-American War and the Writing of a Novel: Reflections on History and the Art of Fiction." Apostol was introduced by the late Benedict Anderson, professor emeritus in international studies, whose work, she remarked, had greatly influenced her own writing. Apostol then discussed how the Filipino-American War is not a subject many Filipinos talk about. One can often find stories about what led up to the war and the postwar effects, but there are few first-person accounts about life during the war. The only information Apostol was able to find in her research were accounts by U.S. generals. So far no written work by the Filipino people on this topic exists.

Not only did she discuss the lack of authentic Filipino voices in narratives about the Filipino-American War, but she also explained the limitations of visual representations from this period in Filipino history. She passed around her extensive collection of stereocards from various time periods depicting portraits of many different people taken by known and unknown photographers. Stereocards are two photo images of the same object taken at slightly different angles



Ethel filling in for the missing 'L' in "Tacloban" in front of Robinsons Place, Summer 2014.



Zumba time at the Women's Shelter in Tacloban, Summer 2014. Photo taken by Art Bastes.

that, when viewed together through a stereoscope, appear three-dimensional. The stereoscope creates an impression of depth and solidity by forming a new image from two disparate perspectives.

As a child when traveling to the Philippines for family vacations, I was enamored by the beauty of the islands: the white sandy beaches, the crystal-clear blue ocean, and the rich culture infused within the sights, sounds, and smells showcased at the main tourist attractions. I saw this pristine vacation world with young eyes, unaware of the history or complexities of the Philippines. My vision was very one-dimensional at the time. After studying Filipino history and literature at Cornell, I began to see other perspectives of my home country. A complex picture emerged as my views on my ancestry and identity changed. This awakening to deeper realities fueled my decision to pursue an independent global health field experience in the Philippines.

In the summer of 2014, I spent two months in Tacloban, a city in central Philippines that had been devastated by Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013. I received a travel grant from the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell. Through the nongovernmental organization Volunteer for the Visayans, I distributed relief goods, worked on a nutrition project, and assisted at a rural health clinic and a local women's shelter, which housed women and children, mostly young girls between the ages of 10 and 18 years old.

Working at the women's shelter was an extremely meaningful experience because I had to build relationships with survivors of not just Typhoon Haiyan, but also sexual abuse, rape, human trafficking, and abandonment. Initially, my background hindered this process because I could not

truly relate to their experiences, having not undergone such trauma growing up in the United States. To break the ice, I unabashedly sang Disney's "Let It Go" along with them, really emulating the deeper meaning of the lyrics. By showing vulnerability through my silly performance, I was able to break down some barriers and improve my relationship with the women and girls at the shelter.

As the weeks passed, they began to accept me into their close-knit group. I felt honored when the younger ones called me *até*, or older sister. As I got to know them better, I was able to organize activities that not only focused on health and wellness, but also engaged their joy in the arts and entertainment. For example, I wrote Tagalog lyrics about dental hygiene to the tune of their favorite song. I also collaborated with another NGO, HELP International, to sponsor their first field trip to a swimming pool. My efforts were later recognized at Cornell when I received the 2015 International Women's Day Leadership Award and the Florence Halpern Award.

My experience in Tacloban made me reevaluate the implications of my Filipino American identity and understand the power I have as both an insider and outsider to use my knowledge and layered perspective to change lives. I recently applied for a Fulbright Research Grant to the Philippines to study the social determinants that impact adolescent identity and sexuality. If awarded a Fulbright scholarship, this opportunity would fuse my Asian heritage with my passion for global health and medicine. Ultimately, I want to become a doctor who addresses issues of public health equity, especially among women and adolescents, in the Philippines, Asia, and across the globe. 🌍

NOTES

- 1 Apostol, *Gun Dealers' Daughter*, 15.
- 2 Senen Roxas (father) in discussion with the author, December 2015.
- 3 Roxas, discussion, December 2015.

SEAP Languages:



Outing trip for students in Thai1100 class (Elements of Thai Language and Culture, Fall'15) to experience traditional Buddhist rituals and festivities of honoring the Dead (Khao Slark Taak Baat, 9/27/15) at Wat Lao Samakhitham in Whitney Point, New York.



Learning from Community in Thai Classes

by Ngampit Jagacinski
senior lecturer of Thai



Khun Phiw and Khun Phloy from Tamarind restaurant in Ithaca joined in the fun and taught cooking to students in the Thai Language Program at their semester get-together at the Kahin Center, 11/1/15.



Burmese Beyond Cornell: SEAP Brings Burmese Language Instruction to Utica

Aye Min Thant

graduate student in Asian studies and
SEAP outreach assistant



Utica, New York, is making a name for itself as the “town that loves refugees.” The schools, hospitals, and city hall work together with the local businesses, community gardens, and places of worship to offer resources not only for those arriving from foreign countries, but also for locals to learn more about the new residents and to get involved in supporting their transition to the United States.

By constantly reassessing the needs of the community, locals work in partnership with institutions, such as Cornell, to create new ways to support refugees and help their resettlement go more smoothly. One such project is the beginning



Burmese class offered at Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC), a collaborative effort initiated by SEAP Outreach. The course has now completed its second year and is supported with Title VI funding from the US Department of Education as part

of SEAP’s National Resource Center (NRC) grant. The project also intersects with SEAP’s Burma/Myanmar Initiative, aimed at strengthening and expanding Burmese studies at Cornell and beyond.

I first learned about this course while working at SEAP as a graduate student assistant for outreach, and my very first thought was, why Utica? It turns out that in the last three decades, more than three thousand refugees from Burma (many of them Karen and other ethnic groups) have been resettled in Utica, and the Burmese community now makes up 5 percent of the population. SEAP is committed to expanding Southeast Asian language learning opportunities outside of Cornell, and partnering with a community college in Utica is a wonderful opportunity to work toward that goal.

In addition to having the largest concentration of refugees from Burma in the Northeast, Utica was a logical place to launch this effort because of the people we have had the honor of working with. Everyone from Carolyn DeJohn, coordinator for the Center for Corporate and Community Education at MVCC, who was instrumental in setting up this class, to Kyi Kyi Min and Saw Bwel Bwel, the two instructors for the course, to the students, all of whom took the time to come to class after a long day at their jobs, were vital components for making this class possible. The students, all residents of Utica, were mainly educators, social service providers, and health care professionals. Through the NRC grant, SEAP was able to provide nine scholarships to teachers and others who work in the Utica City School District. The individuals who took the

Burmese class interact with refugees from Burma on a daily basis and have a desire to serve them better. Members of the refugee community have also played a critical role in getting this program started, and ultimately, they will determine the future of Burmese language instruction in Utica.

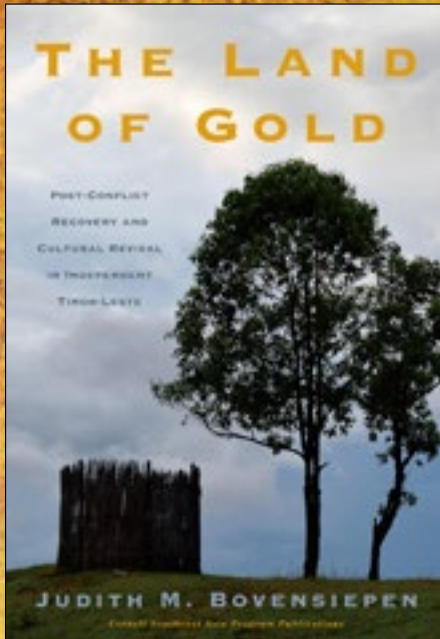
For example, Sayama Kyi Kyi Min, or teacher Kyi Kyi Min, was one of the very first Burmese refugees to arrive in Utica. She has spent a large portion of her time in the United States working to provide translation services to refugees from Burma settled in the area. Her primary job is at the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, a center offering the social, legal, and educational resources necessary for successful refugee resettlement. She has worked with SEAP previously as a part-time Burmese language instructor at Cornell, and she piloted the first Burmese conversation class that took place during spring 2014 at MVCC. She is now training Saw Bwel Bwel to teach the class and helping SEAP build a solid partnership with MVCC and the refugee community to support Burmese language instruction in Utica.

The students and their desire to better connect to those they work with have also been indispensable to the success of this course. One student, Ellen Schulze, who teaches English as a second language, said, “I learned a lot about the culture from the classes I attended, which is helpful since I work with Burmese and Karen students.” Other students included a pair of school speech pathologists, a member of the US Air Force, and a principal and other teachers from the Utica City School District. In their reviews of the course, the students expressed their appreciation for the opportunity this course offers to learn “something that is rare, and not offered everywhere,” but is nevertheless a necessity in Utica.

Of course, within the short time frame of six weeks, it is challenging to teach the basics of a language as complex as Burmese. With a script consisting of an abugida rather than an alphabet, and a sharp distinction between colloquial and literary styles, Burmese is a type of language most Americans have had little exposure to. However, the instructors and students gave it their best. By the end of the course, the students felt confident enough to exchange hellos and thank-yous in Burmese when a few members of SEAP (associate director Thamora Fishel, new Burmese lecturer Yu Yu Khaing, and myself) visited them on the last day of their class. Eager to try out their new language skills, they looked forward to conversing with the Burmese refugees they serve.

Many of the students expressed an interest in taking “part two” of the class and continuing to learn Burmese. The challenge will be finding ways to sustain the course and build upon it without ongoing direct Title VI funding—and that means improving the curriculum and engaging heritage learners.

SEAP Publications

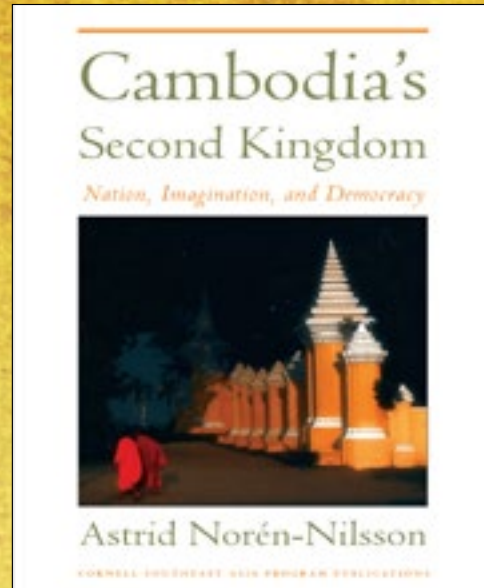


The Land of Gold: Post-Conflict Recovery and Cultural Revival in Independent Timor-Leste

Judith M. Bovensiepen

In the village of Funar, located in the central highlands of Timor-Leste, the disturbing events of the twenty-four-year-long Indonesian occupation are rarely articulated in narratives of suffering. Instead, the highlanders emphasize the significance of their return to the sacred land of the ancestors, a place where “gold” is abundant and life is thought to originate. On the one hand, this collective amnesia is due to villagers’ exclusion from contemporary nation-building processes, which bestow recognition only on those who actively participated in the resistance struggle against Indonesia. On the other hand, the cultural revival and the privileging of the ancestral landscape and traditions over narratives of suffering derive from a particular understanding of how human subjects are constituted. Before life and after death, humans and the land are composed of the same substance; only during life are they separated. To recover from the forced dislocation the highlanders experienced under the Indonesian occupation, they thus seek to reestablish a mythical, primordial unity with the land by reinvigorating ancestral practices. Never leaving out of sight the intense political and emotional dilemmas imposed by the past on people’s daily lives, *The Land of Gold* seeks to go beyond prevailing theories of post-conflict reconstruction that prioritize human relationships. Instead, it explores the significance of people’s affective and ritual engagement with the environment and with their ancestors as survivors come to terms with the disruptive events of the past.

Judith Bovensiepen is a social anthropologist with an interest in island Southeast Asia, especially Timor-Leste, where she has been carrying out fieldwork since 2005. She joined the University of Kent in 2011, after spending one year as a postdoctoral fellow at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris. She holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and has studied in France at the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales.



Cambodia's Second Kingdom: Nation, Imagination, and Democracy

Astrid Norén-Nilsson

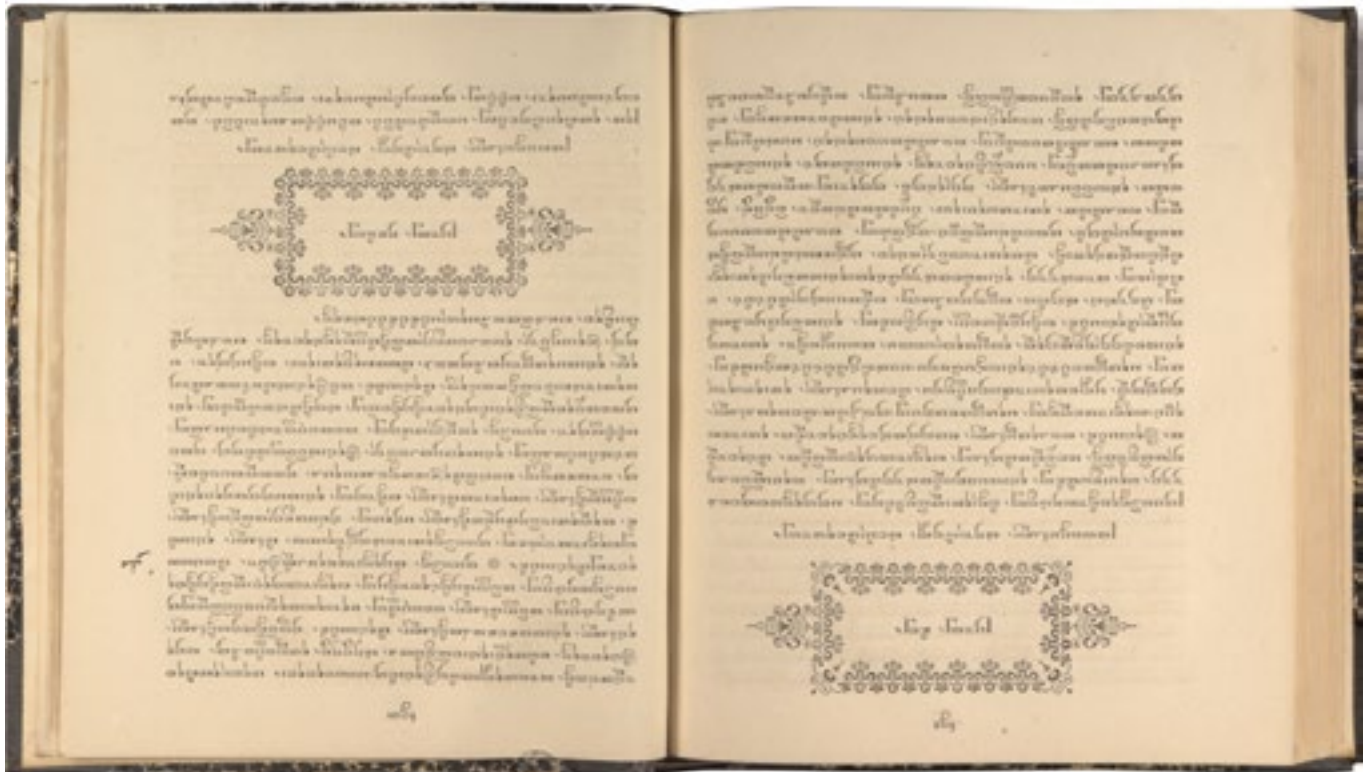
Cambodia's Second Kingdom is an exploration of the role of nationalist imaginings, discourses, and narratives in Cambodia since the 1993 reintroduction of a multiparty democratic system. Competing nationalistic imaginings are shown to be a more prominent part of party political contestation in the Kingdom of Cambodia than typically believed. For political parties, nationalistic imaginings became the basis for strategies to attract popular support, electoral victories, and moral legitimacy. This book uses uncommon sources, such as interviews with key contemporary political actors, to analyze Cambodia’s post-conflict reconstruction politics. It exposes how nationalist imaginings, typically understood to be associated with political opposition, have been central to the reworking of political identities and legitimacy bids across the political spectrum. The author examines the entanglement of notions of democracy and national identity, and traces out a tension between domestic elite imaginings and the liberal democratic framework in which they operate.

Astrid Norén-Nilsson is a political science consultant, contributing author, and political and security analyst for various international concerns. She is vice president of the Cambodian Institute for Strategic Studies in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and former research fellow for KITLV, Leiden, The Netherlands. She was a Gates Scholar at the University of Cambridge, where she earned a PhD in politics and international studies and an MPhil in development studies.



Gods and Scholars:

Studying Religion at a Secular University



Kitab Koran: tetedakanipun ing tembung Arab, kadjawekaken. *Javanese*, 1858



Fredrika Loew

Collections Assistant, Division of
Rare and Manuscript Collections,
Cornell University Library

From its founding in 1865, Cornell University has been firmly nonsectarian, welcoming students and faculty of any religion, or no religion. Controversial for mid-nineteenth-century universities, which were usually denominational, this secular approach did not exclude religion from campus life. On the contrary, as its library collections grew rapidly, the new university sought out religious works of all types and eras.



THE IDEA that a secular university would collect religious texts for academic and personal study inspired *Gods and Scholars: Studying Religion at a Secular University*, online at the Cornell University Library website and displayed in the Hirshland Exhibition Gallery of the Rare and Manuscript Collections in Kroch Library. Though limited by physical space, in curating this exhibit, I was able to show the breadth of manuscripts owned by the university, including Cornell historical documents such as lecture notes and A.D. White's correspondence about religion to various people. The exhibit is also fully digitized and designed by Ken Williams, web developer and graphic designer for the Rare and Manuscript Collections, with high-resolution scans of the materials as well as the text from the exhibition. Digitization is an important component of exhibitions because it allows viewers to access materials up close from anywhere, and it also reduces the physical handling of the manuscripts.

By the time the first incoming class arrived in 1868, instructors and students could access a vast array of sacred works. Professors began teaching Chinese, Japanese, and Sanskrit as early as the 1870s and offered other unlisted Asian languages as needed. Though the university possessed several copies of Asian religious texts, the majority of Southeast Asian works didn't arrive at Cornell until the mid-twentieth century. The Echols Collection, named in

honor of John M. Echols, professor of linguistics and literature in the Southeast Asia Program, began to take shape in the 1950s and consists of thousands of photographs, manuscripts, books, and audio and visual materials on Southeast Asia. The collection is housed in the Kroch Library Asia Collections, curated by Gregory Green and Jeffrey Petersen, as well as the Rare and Manuscript Collections.

I was able to utilize this collection and display some of its materials, including a Balinese Ancestral Festival display, in *Gods and Scholars*. Other items in the exhibit include Buddhist texts in Burmese written on reed, Thai Buddhist texts, and several fragments of a Buddhist text in Sanskrit from Afghanistan. Donated to the library in 2005, the fragments belong to a larger corpus that comprise the earliest texts in Mahayana Buddhism. These types of manuscripts spread through a large region that included Southeast Asia. Though the Cornell Library possesses several beautiful Qur'ans, I was only able to find a few pre-1950 Indonesian Qur'ans and have on display in the exhibit an 1858 Javanese Qur'an.

Cornell University was not the first nonsectarian Ivy League school, but it was seen by many religious followers as an atheist institute that bred heathens with no morals. Others believed that any religion on campus was in direct opposition to Cornell's charter and should not be allowed. It is my hope that this exhibition will not only

expose viewers to the materials housed in the Rare and Manuscript Collections, but also show that academia and religion can peacefully coexist.

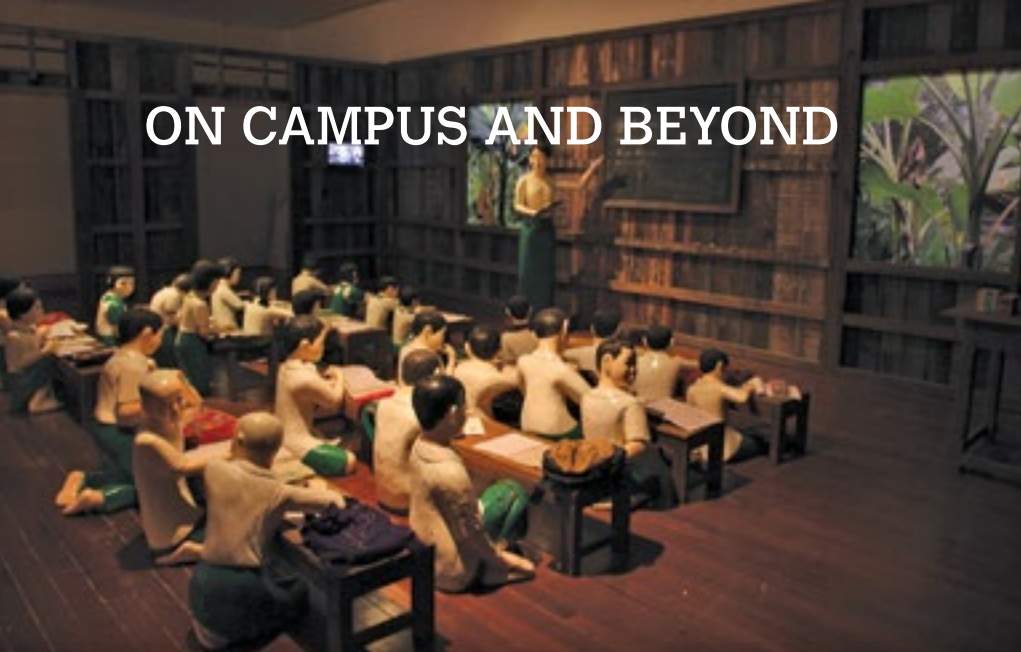
Above: Buddhist fragments on birch bark and palm leaf. Sanskrit, 300–600 CE. From Afghanistan.

Below: Parabaik Manuscript. Burmese, Late 1800s – early 1900s. Buddha seated inside a temple from the story of Buddha and the 31 Planes of Existence.



The website for the Archive is now live at <https://seapapers.library.cornell.edu/>. Initially, there will be little content available; as we add titles and begin uploading files, however, it will grow rapidly over the next five years.

ON CAMPUS AND BEYOND



Left: *The Sick Classroom*; Nge Lay; 2013; Mixed Media, 2 channel video, photographs; Installation view Singapore Biennale 2013 at Singapore Art Museum. Below: Nge Lay.



Graduate Student Conference: (Re)Creating Currents in Southeast Asia

From March 11 to 13, 2016, the SEAP Graduate Student Committee will convene the 18th Annual SEAP Graduate Student Conference. This year's theme, "(Re)Creating Currents in Southeast Asia," explores the concept of the current—the mental or physical force that pulls, shapes, electrifies, or overwhelms subjects and objects in myriad ways. How is Southeast Asia created through currents in practice, and in discourse, and how can these currents be understood? In thinking about currents as processual coalescences of old and new ideas, how do new scholars situate their work amid these flows?

The theme was conceptualized by the conference's planning committee, whose members include graduate students Alexandra Dalferro, Chairat Polmuk, Anissa Rahadinintyas, Van Mai Tran, and Yen Vu. The students' intention was to craft a central idea with a guiding structure open enough to allow for a variety of submissions; during their deliberations, they considered images such as light-casting prisms before deciding on the notion of the current and its multiple interpretive possibilities. The committee members received over 60 abstracts from around the world and were faced with the difficult task of choosing fifteen to be presented at the conference.

Selected contributors will present their work as part of a panel, and paper abstracts will be included in the conference program. The committee is excited and honored to welcome Tamara Loos, associate professor of history at Cornell, as this year's keynote speaker. Professor Loos will discuss her forthcoming book, *Bones Around My Neck: The Life and Exile of a Prince Provocateur*, a human-scale narrative about the most dramatic turn of events in Siam's political history: its struggle to hold on to independence in the face of encroaching imperialism. The life story of an unwitting provocateur and prince, Prisdang Jumsai (1852–1935), is the vehicle for Dr. Loos's exploration of this historic moment. The SEAP graduate student community welcomes all interested individuals to join us in discussing the currents that shape Southeast Asia.

Visiting Artists from Myanmar/Burma

Nge Lay and Aung Ko, contemporary artists from Yangon, will be visiting campus from April 23 to April 29, 2016. While at Cornell, they will be presenting an Artist Talk at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum on April 28 at 5:15 p.m. in the Wing lecture room as well as a lecture in conjunction with a new course entitled Crossing Borders for Education: The Case of Myanmar (EDUC 4940/ASIAN 4940, Monday 1:30–4 p.m.), co-taught by Professors Bryan (Education) Duff and Kaja McGowan (History of Art). Central to their visit will be a discussion of Nge Lay's large-scale installation, *The Sick Classroom*, and the Thuye'dan Village Art Project, an initiative she and husband Aung Ko established in 2007 to bring contemporary art to the village's residents. Representing the culmination of years of research, their work examines issues regarding education, health, and quality of life in underdeveloped areas of Myanmar/Burma. Both the artists' visit and the new course have been made possible by an Internationalizing the Cornell Curriculum Grant.



Migration of the ladybugs;
Tiffany Chung;
2009 oil and alcohol-based markers
on paper;
31 1/2 x 43 1/4 in (80 x 110 cm);
Image courtesy of Tiffany Chung and
Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Conference on Cultures of Censorship

Organized by Professor Tamara Loos (Dept. of History) and Rebecca Townsend (PhD candidate, History), Cultures of Censorship, to be held April 30, 2016, will explore themes of censorship and self-censorship in Thai social media and cultural politics. Since the military coups of 2006 and 2014, the press and academic scholarship have paid serious attention to the *lèse majesté* laws that protect Thailand's king, queen, and heir apparent from criticism. However, few have taken notice of the complex and pervasive ways that social and cultural pressures not only dovetail with the law but move beyond it to restrict quotidian social and cultural practices. Acts of censorship are increasingly executed through personal relationships and social media venues, as well as through public appeals to nationalism, loyalty to authority, normative morality, and national security. Censorship is used as a mechanism for social and cultural control—areas that are typically only indirectly targeted by the state and formal politics. The silencing of the expression of ideas that can in any way be construed as anti-establishment has opened a space into which rumors and innuendo have flowed. Only in cases of extreme censorship can rumor become a powerful but informal political technique.

Historically, formal censorship has been used by the Thai government, military, and police under various political regimes ranging from an absolute monarchy and authori-

tarian military governments to a constitutional monarchy and democratically elected governments. Subjects of censorship have included educational textbooks, novels, academic works, films, newspapers, television, and social media. While the authorities use surveillance and law to enforce censorship, Thais are also subjected to social censorship from co-workers, neighbors, and even family members. We propose to look beyond normative politics and at the cultural foundations that undergird a long history of censorship and surveillance within social formations outside the state. Self-censorship is also common and ranges from silencing out of political necessity or out of a desire to "fit in" with social and cultural norms, which are profoundly informed by class hierarchy, gender norms, and an urban-rural divide. Those who self-censor often make their acts explicit as a form of "unspoken" protest or, alternatively, to show loyalty to authority. Thus, censorship and self-censorship mediate access to participation in political life and the public sphere on a daily basis. Conference presenters will address these diverse and significant manifestations and implications of censorship in Thai political, social, and economic life. Speakers will include David Streckfuss, center director, CIEE Programs in Thailand; Aim Sinpeng, lecturer, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney; Rebecca Townsend, PhD candidate, Department of History, Cornell University.



TWO INDONESIAN MUSIC PERFORMANCES: April 24 Barnes Hall

Balinese *wayang* meets Appalachian "crankies." American old-time meets Indonesian *kroncong*. All this in **Shadow Ballads**, a multimedia collaboration of nine guest artists, including *dalang* Gusti Sudarta, violinist Danis Sugiyanto, and singer Peni Candra Rini from Indonesia, plus duo Anna and Elizabeth from the United States. Preceded by the spring concert of the **Cornell Gamelan Ensemble**, with Danis Sugiyanto and Peni Candra Rini as featured guests.

Cornell Gamelan Ensemble, 1 p.m.
Shadow Ballads, 8 p.m.

Free admission. For more information, call (607) 255-4760 or email Loralyn Light at ll48@cornell.edu.

Presented by the Department of Music, with funding from the Cornell Council for the Arts

UPCOMING EVENTS

KAHIN CENTER UPDATE



Ryan Buyco

PhD student in Asian studies and
Kahin Center building coordinator



Productive Ghosts at Kahin

When I find myself working alone late at night in the Kahin Center, I sometimes hear noises—floors creaking, clicks of doors opening or closing, the sounds of someone moving up or down the stairs.

I haven't been at Cornell very long—only three in PhD student years—but there has been an ongoing inside joke among the graduate students about the ghosts that haunt this building. I can't say with much certainty, but the power of suggestion sometimes makes me feel as if a presence is really in the air, especially when I am alone late at night. But then again, it could be the mice. Or another graduate student, visiting scholar, or SEAP faculty hiding in their offices getting work done. Who really knows?

The Kahin Center, and SEAP more generally, is a way station for Southeast Asia scholars. One can easily get this sense when visiting the archives in the basement, where you can find the dissertations and other work of previous academics who have passed through these doors.

Sometimes, I have a chance to talk with SEAP alumni, and what I find is

that everyone has a story about the Kahin Center (at least those who attended Cornell after the building was dedicated in 1992). The memories are of work and leisure—Professor Kahin listening to a graduate student's field research on the third floor; drinking with like-minded graduate students in the downstairs seminar room; smoking on the balcony in room 204.

Sitting in my office, I see some trinkets left by former students and scholars: miscellaneous boxes, a locked file cabinet I have no access to, a dictionary, a safari hat, a Balinese painting donated by SEAP alumna Barbara Harvey (PhD '74), more old books. I'll probably leave an item or two when it's my turn, just to keep the tradition going.

A lot of history has taken place at the Kahin Center, and perhaps even more groundbreaking scholarship has been produced. Yet, it's so easy to for-

get all of this in the day-to-day grind of every semester—writing up research, finishing a reflection paper, studying a Southeast Asian language (it's Tagalog for me).

But sometimes late at night, when I'm working alone in my office, the creaks, the clicks, and the noises that I hear coming from the Kahin Center remind me of where I am, of the scholars who sat in this building thinking and musing on their own projects, the friendly faces of SEAP graduate students, faculty, and staff, and of course Southeast Asia, which continues to inspire me and everyone else affiliated with SEAP, especially on the coldest of days in Ithaca.

I can't say with certainty that these noises are ghosts, but I can say they're productive in that they remind me of the greater SEAP community and my place within it.

AWARDS

Foreign Language Area Studies Recipients Academic Year 2015–2016

Name	Discipline	Language Studied
Alexandra G. Dalferro	Anthropology	Khmer
Hilary Faxon	Development Sociology	Burmese
Kevin Foley	Government	Burmese
Robin Karlin	Linguistics	Burmese
Corey Keating	Music	Vietnamese
Adna Karabegović	City and Regional Planning	Indonesian/Malaysian
Amy VanNocker	International Agriculture & Rural Development	Burmese

Foreign Language Area Studies Recipients Summer 2015

Name	Discipline	Language Studied
Kevin Foley	Government	Indonesian/Malaysian
Sarah Dougherty	City and Regional Planning	Indonesian/Malaysian
Adna Karabegović	City and Regional Planning	Indonesian/Malaysian
Benjamin Coleman	City and Regional Planning	Tagalog

Fellowships

MILTON L. BARNETT
SCHOLARSHIP

Summer 2015 Southeast Asia Program Thesis Write-up Fellowships

Name	Discipline	Country of Interest	Name Award Received
Sukhum Charoenkajonchai	Regional Science	Thailand	Randy Barker
Diego Fossati	Government	Indonesia	Marty Hatch
Rebecca Townsend	History	Philippines, Thailand	Thak Chaloemtiarana
			Singapore and Malaysia

Summer 2015 Southeast Asia Program Foreign Research Fellowships

Name	Discipline	Country of Interest	Name Award Received
Alexandra Dalferro	Anthropology	Cambodia	Nancy Loncto
Ferdinan Okki Kurniasih	Linguistics	Indonesia	Audrey Kahin
Chairat Polmuk	Asian Literature, Religion & Culture	Thailand	Helen Swank
Anissa Rahadiningtyas	Art History	Indonesia	Deborah Homsher
Katie Rainwater	Development Sociology	Thailand	Oey Giok Po

Summer 2015 Einaudi Center Travel Grants

Name	Discipline	Country Traveled
Chantal Croteau*	Asian Studies	Thailand
Ritwick Ghosh*	Natural Resources	Indonesia
Miran Jang	City and Regional Planning	Vietnam
Carissa Kang*	Human Ecology/Human Development	Singapore
Corey Keating*	Music	Vietnam
Chaturong Napathorn*	International Comparative Labor/ HR	Thailand
Mairin Ng	Human Ecology	Vietnam
Annie Pease	City and Regional Planning	Indonesia
Megan Pulver	City and Regional Planning	Indonesia
Emiko Stock*	Anthropology	Cambodia
Rebecca Townsend*	History	Thailand
Mai Van Tran*	Government	Myanmar
Thet Hein Tun	City and Regional Planning	Indonesia
Alex-Thai Vo*	History	Vietnam
Hoang Vu*	History	Vietnam

*Received research travel funds from both SEAP and Einaudi

Visiting Fellows



Phi Vân Nguyen

Phi Vân Nguyen has been trained in international relations at the Graduate Institute of International studies in Geneva and in Southeast Asian studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. She then worked for various organizations on research projects in Vietnam and Cambodia before joining the PhD program in history at the Université du Québec à Montréal. In addition, she recently defended her dissertation, “Résidus de la guerre: la mobilisation des réfugiés du Nord pour un Vietnam non-communiste, 1954–1975.” She comes to Cornell with a two-year postdoctoral fellowship from the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the Swiss National Foundation for Scientific Research. Her articles on migration, religion, and the Vietnam wars have been published in *Revue historique des armées*, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, and *SOJOURN*. She is now preparing a book manuscript on the 1954 migrants in wartime Vietnam (1954–1975).



Nina Hien

Nina Hien is a cultural anthropologist focusing on the media and visual culture of Vietnam. She received her doctorate from Cornell in 2007 with a dissertation about the practice of photography in Ho Chi Minh City and how it was being used to reanimate “traditional” power structures. Recent publications include an essay in the *Trans Asia Photography Review* about the denial of “the ugly” in documentary photography in Vietnam, an article about the connection between Vietnamese aesthetics and neoliberalism published in *Positions: Asia Critique*, and a chapter in *Food: Ethnographic Encounters* about the globalization of food culture and dining experience in Ho Chi Minh City. She is currently focusing on research that explores the body, the senses, perception, and synesthesia in this digital age.



Guo-Quan Seng

Guo-Quan Seng graduated from the University of Chicago with a PhD in history in summer 2015. He holds an overseas postdoctoral fellowship from the National University of Singapore. Besides being broadly invested in the historiographies of colonial and postcolonial (especially Southeast) Asia, transregional China, and global capitalism, he tries to inform his work with social theory debates. For his dissertation, “Disputed Properties, Contested Identities: Family Law, Social Reform, and the Creole Chinese in Dutch Colonial Java (1830–1942),” he looked at how gender and Creole identities were co-produced with legal processes and social reform movements in Dutch colonial Indonesia during the nineteenth century. Currently, he is working on a book manuscript that ties together tales of Peranakan Chinese divorce and inheritance trials, the intricacies of Javanese marketing patterns and Chinese commercial strategies, and arcane colonial debates about values and morals.



Chotima Chaturawong

Chotima Chaturawong is assistant professor in the Faculty of Architecture at Silpakorn University, Bangkok, where she has taught since 2003. She received a PhD in art history (with a focus on Southeast Asian art) from Cornell University in 2003. Her dissertation was titled “The Architecture of Burmese Buddhist Monasteries in Upper Burma and Northern Thailand: The Biography of Trees.” After returning to Thailand, she continued her research and wrote extensively on architecture in Myanmar in the following published articles: “The Architecture of Buddha Shrines: A Cross-Cultural Study of Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka”; “Architecture of Mon Buddhist Monasteries in Lower Burma”; “Pan-pu-youp-soum Kyaung, Sa-le, Myanmar”; “Art and Architecture of Pagan in Burma and Eastern India under Pala-Sena Kings”; “Chiang Mai and Mandalay”; and “Burmese Monasteries in Chiang Mai and Lampang.”

Warren B. Bailey, professor,
finance and Asian studies

Randolph Barker, professor
emeritus, agricultural economics
and Asian studies

Victoria Beard, associate
professor, city and regional
planning (on leave 2015–2017)

Anne Blackburn, professor, South
Asia and Buddhist studies (on
leave 2015–2016)

Thak Chaloemtiarana, professor
of the Graduate School

Abigail Cohn, professor,
linguistics and Asian studies

Magnus Fiskesjö, associate
professor, anthropology

Chiara Formichi, assistant
professor, Asian studies

Arnika Fuhrmann, assistant
professor, Asian studies

Greg Green, curator, Echols
Collection on Southeast Asia

Martin F. Hatch, professor
emeritus, music and Asian studies

Ngampit Jagacinski, senior
language lecturer, Thai

Yu Yu Khaing, language lecturer,
Burmese

Sarosh Kuruvilla, professor,
industrial and labor relations and
Asian studies

Tamara Lynn Loos, associate
professor, history and Asian
studies

Andrew Mertha, professor,
government

Kaja M. McGowan, associate
professor, art history, archaeology,
and Asian studies; and director of
the Cornell University Southeast
Asia Program

Christopher J. Miller, senior
lecturer, music

Stanley J. O'Connor, professor
emeritus, art history and Asian
studies

Jolanda Pandin, senior language
lecturer, Indonesian

Thomas Pepinsky, associate
professor, government

Hannah Phan, senior language
lecturer, Khmer

Maria Theresa Savella, senior
language lecturer, Tagalog

James T. Siegel, professor
emeritus, anthropology and Asian
studies

Eric Tagliacozzo, professor,
history and Asian studies

Keith W. Taylor, professor,
Vietnamese cultural studies and
Asian studies

Erik Thorbecke, H.E. Babcock
Professor Emeritus, economics
and food economics

Thúy Tranviet, senior language
lecturer, Vietnamese

Marina Welker, associate
professor, anthropology (on leave
2015–2016)

Andrew Willford, professor,
anthropology and Asian studies

Lindy Williams, professor,
development sociology

John U. Wolff, professor
emeritus, linguistics and Asian
studies

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NEW JOHNSON MUSEUM ACQUISITION

Arahmaiani

Indonesian, born 1961

Lingga-yoni, 2013

Acrylic and rice paper on canvas

Acquired through the Jarett F. and
Younghee Kim-Wait Fund for Islamic
and Middle Eastern Arts

2015.010.002

ARAHMAIANI is one of Indonesia's most renowned contemporary artists, celebrated for her career-long activist stance toward issues of gender and religion, and for her daring works in performance, video, installation, painting, and mixed media. Her work has been exhibited at such groundbreaking exhibitions as *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions* (Asia Society, NY, 1996), *Cities on the Move* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna Secession, Austria, 1998), the 50th Venice Biennale (2003), and *Global Feminisms* (Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY, 2007).

Lingga-yoni (2013) is an iteration of the original work first shown in a solo exhibition in Jakarta in 1993, and subsequently exhibited at *Traditions/Tensions* in 1996. The work features a

provocative intermingling of text and image. Some perceived the combination of Jawi script (an Arabic-Malay script used for Koranic text) with the imagery of the *lingga-yoni* (a symbol of cosmic copulation in Hinduism) as sacrilegious. Exhibited together with an installation comprising a Koran, condoms, and other everyday objects encased in a glass vitrine, the works elicited much controversy. Reactions were so strong that the artist even received death threats, after which she left Indonesia and lived abroad for several years.

Arahmaiani produced the work to make a statement against sexual and religious intolerance, in the context of rising Islamic fundamentalism in contemporary Indonesia, home to the

largest Muslim population in the world today. In addition to the Jawi script, there is a reference to Purnawarman, king of the fifth-century Hindu-Javanese kingdom of Taruma. The inclusion of this text, which reads "Nature is book," in the Sanskrit language and Pallava script, expresses her interest in excavating Java's pre-Islamic history. While the *lingga-yoni* form appears to be subversive because of its literal and inverted representation, its precedent can be found at the fifteenth-century Candi Sukuh Temple, representative of the last phase of Hindu temple construction in Java prior to widespread conversion to Islam in the sixteenth century.

Pamela Nguyen Corey; lecturer in Southeast Asian art, Department of the History of Art & Archaeology; School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

SOUTHEAST ASIA PROGRAM

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